OTHER WORLDS

SCIENCE STORIES

November 1955 35¢

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NEVER
DIES!

A Challenge
By
RAY PALMER

★

RECKONING
FROM
ETERNITY

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30,000
Words
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OTHER WORLDS

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....Editorial...

THIS is D-Day for OTHER-WORLDS. D for Destiny. In short, this is IT! In the first place, you've noticed our new size, larger, better cover display, and 23% more wordage inside. Yes, that's it, more words. Enough more so that now we can give you those long stories we've been saving up for you. But all this is not what we mean by D-Day. It's only a very faint beginning . . .

For several years we've watched the science fiction field decline. We knew why, but economic conditions did not permit us to do anything about it. You see, science fiction has been shoved right back where it was twenty-five years ago. And the build-up back to respectability won't be any over-night affair—it will be a long hard pull, with all the work to be done over again. And it won't be done by the same thing that brought it to popularity before.

Your editor remembers the long haul, because he was in it from the beginning. He began writing science fiction in 1926 and had his first story published in 1929. He wrote many hundreds of thousands of words, and sold practically none of them, then, slowly adding momentum, he sold over three million words, and not very much of that science fiction. Making a living at science fiction was impossible. Then he became editor of *Amazing Stories*. He took it over at the startling figure of 27,000 circulation. His first issue sold 45,000, the next 75,000, and from then on it was a skyrocket that wound up at a dizzying 185,000 record that has never been equalled (and perhaps never will be.)

What caused that record-breaking ride? Well, some of our readers have liked to remind us of how egotistic we are, and it's hard to say anything to answer this question without getting a loud "aha!" from them; but it was ideas that did it. NEW ideas. STARTLING ideas. It was publicity, it was building a fire under readers by giving them things so hot they couldn't put them down, and making them pant for the next issue. Nobody pants for the next issue these days— but they will, soon! It'll be OTHER WORLDS they are panting for.

You see, we may have been in this field for 30 years, but we aren't as old as T. O'Conor Sloane (in his 80's) when we took over *Amazing Stories;* so we still have ideas, and we believe, good ones. You'll begin to get 'em in each issue. Maybe you'll find a few to your liking in this?

First, it isn't exactly an idea that what a magazine is purchased for is its story material. It's the story you read. Elementary. But what KIND of story! Nobody knew, back in 1938. The day of the "travelogue," the space trip that carried its interest on its novelty alone, was finished. It was your present editor who changed that— who got himself a stable of writers, pounded them on the head from noon to midnight, and told them what science fiction had to be, and what they were going to make it. We took raw recruits, from the telephone company (Dave O'Brien), from the city highway commission (Bill McGivern— and brother how well he learned being on TOP today in the writing world!), from a Kansas schoolhouse (Don Wilcox), from a hat store (Berkeley Livingston), from a furniture credit department (Howard Browne), from the determined-to-be-a-writer class

(Robert Moore Williams)—and a lot more. We put people into the stories, with human problems, and the space ship was no longer the story, but only a prop, like a saddle isn't a story in the west, but the guy who rides it is.

That idea alone made science fiction the giant it became. And others (some clever, some not so clever, but all novel) kept it a giant. Every issue something new. Never riding along on the current.

A terrible accident took your editor out of the driver's seat, and when he got back in, the damage had been done. Science fiction no longer had human interest, and apparently was no longer of interest to humans. Worse, they were sour on it. They turned their backs on it in droves, and wouldn't even look again. A few loyal fans suffered on, wading through bushel after bushel of tripe. Until even they began to scream. But no matter how they screamed, nothing happened. Why? Because no body had any ideas. There were a horde of imitators, copy-cat boys such as you see today on TV, where nobody dares to put on anything but a quiz-show, a panel, or a variety show. A hundred different variations of an old idea, *ad nauseum*. That sort of thing is now killing TV. Viewers are desperately scanning the newsstands for a good magazine to read. Unfortunately, they aren't finding them.

That's why we say this is D-Day for OTHER WORLDS, because with this issue we begin the fight to give those disillusioned readers and viewers alike something that will give them the escape they want and need, something that will equal the material that made science fiction a wonderful adventure you wouldn't miss from month to month on a bet.

We start with Hal Annas, and his first 30,000 word novelette, which is really the first part of a 90,000 word trilogy. And we will go on with such things as David V. Reed's gigantic new novel (we won't tell you the title yet), which we think is greater than his famous "Empire of Jegga", "Murder In Space," and many others. Then we have John Bloodstone's new (and towering) character, in the first of a long series (we feel sure) of 100,000 word novels.

In short, we're going to give you stories with real meat to them. Not just in length, but in true power and appeal. Stories with guts, with daring, with imagination, and with tremendous scope.

Just as in the old days we're going to build up a stable of top writers, whose only requisite is that they be brilliantly original. There will be no hacks in this stable, no conformists, no imitators. And if they have a story dear to their hearts to tell, no one shall say them nay!

And tightly at the helm will be your old friend, a pin-wheel of fire, a three-ring circus—and not a bit ashamed of the acts going on all the time, your old pal. *Ray Palmer.*

THE END

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RECKONING FROM ETERNITY

★

By Hal Annas

Illustrated by Lawrence

Surrounded by violence and intrigue, a frightened girl vowed to do everything in her power to bring peace to the planets. Why, then, was her every act destined to bring more bloodshed and betrayal to those she had loved best?

CHAPTER ONE

THE girl stared hopefully at the spot of radiance shimmering in the blackness between her and the stars. From beside her came a low moan, a feeble stirring. She lowered a hand to the hot forehead, glanced at the luminous dial of the oxygen gauge, and tried to calculate how long the remaining oxygen would keep her alive and keep life in the enfeebled body of the man.

The distant radiance seemed to move. Her heart beat faster and her blue eyes strained to pierce the emptiness of space. The man groaned again. Her long sensitive fingers felt over his features, touched the cracked lips. His breath was hot and coming in short gasps.

To avoid the sight her eyes would meet, she left the light off and began feeling her way through darkness to the distant end of the lifeship. After three steps she paused and slowly lifted her left foot. She stepped over the dead body of the com-man and, a little farther along, circled to avoid the bodies of the bearded Eg, the three Marines and the senior officer.

She found the water tap. Careful to hold the cup precisely under it so that not a drop would be spilled, she placed a finger over the pinpoint hole above it. The sound made by the faint trickle brought a burning sensation to her dry throat. She opened her mouth and tried to move her swollen tongue, and thought for a moment that she would faint.

The water stopped running. She pressed harder against the tiny hole. After another futile moment she turned and carefully made her way back.

With slow and labored effort she got one hand under the head of the man and brought the cup to his cracked lips. With infinite care she tilted it. He groaned. A few drops of water ran into his mouth. He made convulsive movements with his arms and legs.

Fighting her own faintness, she held the cup out of reach and lowered his head. She switched on the light, eyes avoiding the scene of chaos toward the distant end of the lifeship. Again she lifted the man's head and poured water between his lips. When the cup was empty she ran a finger around the inside, opened her own parched lips and touched the final drop of moisture to her tongue.

She felt over the bandage on the man's upper body. The thought came that she might make his breathing easier by loosening it. But she couldn't take a chance on his wounds opening again. She had to keep life in him somehow. He was the sole remaining link out here with her kind back on Earth.

She got two helmets and placed them nearby, then turned off the light. The time would come, she knew, when they could no longer breathe the nauseous air of death. And there was no way to get rid of the bodies of the men this man had killed. She couldn't work the mechanism by which men had earlier disposed of bodies. Nor had she strength left to drag them to the tube that would cast them out into cold emptiness.

The dream had vanished; the last ray of hope had gone. It seemed only yesterday that she had been in the arms of Norwich Wyatt and heard him tell her that the refugee ship would take her safely to her people, where he would join her within a month. Few could believe that Earth was at last to be free of war. But they had to believe or give way to despair.

Now she had been adrift thirty-seven days. None in the lifeship had been able to make her understand exactly what had happened. All she knew was that the refugee ship had been attacked, driven deep into space and finally destroyed. The confusion, the killing, the horror of the merciless fighting, had cast a shadow of unreality over the events.

Thirteen men and three women had got off in this lifeship. At first there had been order, but after days passed and then weeks, with the com-man sending out a distress signal, futilely, hopelessly,

and with no rescue in sight, and food and water running low, the men had fought. They quarreled over little things. A man who ate more than his share was killed by two others and shoved into the tube. A woman giving her favors to the man who did the rationing was discovered getting more than her share of the water. Both died violently and the senior officer appointed another to dispense the water and food.

Five of the remaining eleven men mutinied and took control. The senior officer locked himself in the spacesuit compartment and escaped death. While the men were ravishing one of the remaining women and fighting over Aleta herself, the senior officer came out with a blaster.

The mutiny ended with three more men and one woman dead. No more violence resulted for twelve days. But these were not the disciplined men of a warship. They were the nerve cases, the wrecks of the war, and the end was inevitable.

Aleta had favored none. But the man she was now trying to keep alive had defended her during the mutiny and again when the final fighting broke out. He had defended her well, and all but the last spark had gone out of him in the effort.

About him she knew only that he had fought in the war and been disabled. His features and upper body were mostly scar tissue. This made it difficult to guess his age, but the vigor with which he had fought here in the lifeship indicated he was under thirty-five. She hadn't known that he had an artificial left leg until it became necessary to remove most of his clothes to get to his wounds.

Again she glanced out at the shimmering radiance. It seems larger, nearer. She went to the instrument panel and set the dial to lower the temperature from fifty to forty degrees fahrenheit, this to keep the dead bodies from decaying too fast. She pressed the button marked *Flare*. She placed more covering over the feverish body of the man.

She thought of Norwich Wyatt and their plans. Peace, he had told her, was being negotiated with the rebellious colonies in the SYZ System. That meant that he and she could at last go out to the green planet, near the edge of the galaxy, which resembled Earth in almost every respect except that it had never known war. They would be married and rear children in peace.

Now the hope for happiness had vanished. But she had always been healthy and vigorous and the throb of life in her body would not cease. Five feet ten inches tall, willowy, blonde, freckled, she was a picture of vitality, but the light in the depths of her blue eyes had dimmed.

If she lived — The ember of hope sought hard to flame anew. If she lived, she vowed, she would devote the last measure of her strength to eradicating the disease of war from the minds of men.

The locket watch hanging between her breasts ticked on. With every tick another second flowed into eternity. The man beside her gasped out his strength at irregular intervals. Out in the void time stood still. Or did it?

The radiance seemed larger, closer.

Again she went to the instrument panel and pressed the button marked *Flare*. Dizziness came with the effort. There was a lapse of memory. The next she knew she was again staring out. The radiance seemed closer still.

An hour later she was able to make out the shape of the hull. She was not actually seeing the ship, she knew, for that was impossible in a lightless void. She was seeing the radiant energy it had gathered, which meant that it had been in space for months on end, possibly years.

How much longer before she could discern the markings on its bow was a question she couldn't answer. She lost count of the number of times she had fired flares. And her memory was vague.

She studied the markings with rising

tension. They were a series of ovals looped through one another. She made out the dots, the larger dot in the center, the nucleus.

For a long moment she ceased to breathe. Then she looked again.

"Please, God, *no!*" she gasped.

But as she looked the third time she knew, and strength flowed out of her body. Her arms and legs trembled.

"Dear, God, no!" she prayed.

But she knew. The marking was plain now. The ship came on, loomed gigantic, its long radiant hull showing scars of untold space battles.

She sank down weakly beside the man, stretched an arm across his body as though to protect him. Her watch ticked on; her heart throbbed up in her swollen throat.

She prayed that she would faint and that the end would be sudden. But life pulsed through her body and the stimulant of fear kept her keenly conscious and sensitive to her surroundings.

Time folded upon itself. It seemed that she closed her eyes and opened them and the spacesuited figures were out there. Giants. The smallest of them seven feet from head to heels. Red eyes. Snow-white hair. A greenish tinge in the flesh of their features. Monsters.

"Novakkans," she breathed. "Please, God, let me die."

She felt the slight jarring as they moved over and under the lifeship. She knew when they began working with the airlock, for the vibrations carried as sound in the fetid air about her. She even knew what they were doing, and the knowledge brought new terror.

If they blasted the lock open, she knew, she would die quickly as the heat and air escaped. They were not preparing to do that. They were sealing a chamber about the outer lock. Then they would rip the lock apart and come in and take her alive.

She couldn't faint, couldn't lose consciousness. She could only wait. But prolonged and helpless terror finally exhausted her. Dimly she watched them come in. The next time things were clear she was on a table in a circular room with a Novakkan bending over her. Again she passed into unconsciousness.

Then she began to be fully conscious. Her hip stung where, she knew, she'd been given an injection. Her fear was less; her thirst greater. She was given a swallow of water. It hurt her throat and made her even more thirsty.

Later she was given more water, and as her mind cleared she realized she was strapped to the table. She received another injection and liquid that wasn't water. Her fears became submerged.

She slept. When she awoke she was no longer restrained by straps. A Novakkan stood watching her. Over seven feet tall, broad in proportion, he wore sandals, a colorful skirt that barely covered his enormous thighs, and a girdle six inches wide at his hips. His skin was green tinged from forehead to toes, his hair as white as snow; his eyes blood red.

In an earth language she understood, his voice deep and strong, he told her, "You're on a Novakkan raider. You've been taught to think of us as monsters. But we're not. We're descendents of Earth's exiles. So control your fear."

She knew it was true. Long ago she'd heard the story of how they'd grown and changed on the planet of exile. But this was not the memory so prominent in the minds of Earthlings. Novakkans were pictured as the scourge of the universe. They plundered the spaceways and planets from one end of the galaxy to the other.

Expeditions had been sent out to destroy them. But something always went wrong. The Novakkan ships would strike and vanish, scatter across parsecs of space. They couldn't be grouped for an effective blow. And while Earth fleets were searching for them, they would suddenly raid the home planet.

It was said that they rarely took prisoners.

Aleta made no reply. She no longer

trembled in fear. Whether her quiescence was owing to the injections or her lack of interest in her fate was something that didn't bother her.

"Your full name?" the Novakkan demanded.

He was not the one who had given her the injections. He was broader, taller, and his body showed numerous scars. A half-moon scar from his left ear to his nose added a grimace to his fierce features.

"Aleta Aline Winrow," she replied, surprised that she could make her tongue work.

"I'm Rahn Buskner," he said. "I'm equivalent to the senior officer of a boarding party on an Earth warship. This is a raider and we haven't room for prisoners, but you have knowledge and it is necessary for us to drain it out of you."

Aleta gasped. "You're going to scan my brain?"

He shook his head. "We're going to question you under drugs. But it has to be delayed. We've deduced a few things. If they can be confirmed we will no longer need you nor the man who was with you."

"Where is he? Aleta asked, rising.

He handed her a pair of enormous sandals. "Put these on."

She suddenly realized that she was gowned in a fine nylox or silken smock. Nothing else. The thought brought confusion and color to her cheeks.

"My clothes?" she said.

"No time to bother about them now. We're tracking a ship and should be coming up on it soon. Come."

She followed him along a passage to another circular room. There on a low sleeve bunk was the man she had kept alive. He was still unconscious. She hurried to him, checked his pulse, felt of his forehead.

The Novakkan whirled at the sound of a sharp ringing. He glanced back, then plunged through the entranceway and allowed the bulkhead to close.

Curious and wanting to ask for water, Aleta tried the bulkhead. Seconds passed before she found the stud that would open it.

There was no sign of Rahn Buskner in the passage, but other Novakkans were hurrying along. Farther on, she saw still others, all hurrying, all buckling on metal or plastic armor. They glanced at her but didn't pause.

Returned to the room, she found that the man's breathing was even and that the fever had diminished. But it was evident that he had not been medically treated as she had.

Except for the bunk the room was bare. The walls were cushiony and she presumed that the ceiling was also.

Voices, deep and loud, sounded here in the room. The ringing came again and again at spaced intervals.

Exploring the walls, she found other studs, trying each in turn. She couldn't tell what the results were, but eventually a miniature viewplate lit up. Nothing showed on it except blackness and the stars.

CHAPTER TWO

ALETA felt herself being drawn across the room. From experience she knew the ship was maneuvering and that its gravity was shifting to compensate.

Loud voices, in an unfamiliar language, sounded all around her, but she couldn't locate their source.

At the edge of the viewplate appeared a tiny glow. It grew and stretched toward the center of the plate. It moved on across and at the end of it appeared the hull of a tiny ship.

She studied the scene. From the length of the glow she judged the ship was using full power. It grew larger. Moments later she realized it was fleeing, trying to escape the Novakkan ship.

The portent wasn't clear immediately. To begin with, she didn't understand how ships could get so deep in space.

Their reactors developed enormous thrust but not enough in a lifetime to move them from one star to another. She'd heard talk of fast rays, dimensions, time shifts and multiple drivers, but never understood them.

The image on the screen grew in size. A pinpoint of white brilliance appeared on its hull, separated itself from the ship, grew larger, leaped toward her. Another followed and then came in endless streams.

She suddenly understood that she was in the midst of a space battle. The fleeing ship was desperately defending itself, striving to burn the Novakkan ship out of the cosmos with photonic energy.

The screen flashed blindingly. She held her breath. The flash came again and again and each time she saw a huge mast of light shrinking, speeding toward the fleeing ship. She wondered how she could see light when it was not reflected, then remembered that weapons used slow photons which, becoming mass, would not reflect but destroy. And the screen revealed things invisible to the naked eye.

The flashes became so rapid they obscured everything else on the screen. The ringing continued. Deep voices roared in the room. It went on and on, seemingly for hours, then ceased.

The viewplate cleared. The ship there was much larger. No pinpoint of brilliance appeared on its hull. Nor did a glow extend from it. It was no longer using power.

Lifeships put out from it. Miniature flashes near at hand followed. Where lifeships had been, a moment later was a series of fading red glows. Going out from the glows in every direction were the fragments of the lifeships and the bodies of their occupants.

Her eyes blurred. It seemed so futile, so needlessly wasteful. She consoled herself with the thought that the creatures out there were finding a quick death. She found the stud and shut off the view.

Turning to the wounded man, she saw that his glazed eyes were open. His cracked lips parted and he mumbled, "Water."

Again she opened the bulkhead. The passage was empty of life, but sounds of screaming reached her ears.

She hurried to the cross passage, saw a huge Novakkan with an Earthwoman over his shoulder. The woman was screaming, but the features of the Novakkan were expressionless.

She saw still another Novakkan rip the spacesuit off a small figure. She was close enough to see that it was a small man or boy. As she stood horror stricken, the Novakkan lifted the figure high overhead and brought it down across his knee, breaking its back.

Sickened, she hurried back to the wounded man. It seemed that here was her only link with sanity and civilization.

The man was calling feebly for water. His forehead was hot, his eyes unseeing. He talked as in delirium. Some of the words she could understand. They were about home on Earth and green fields and timbered hill. He seemed to be reliving his childhood. She discovered that she was holding his hand and that her tears were dripping on it.

Immeasurable time fled before the bulkhead opened. Rahn Buskner came in. She leaped up and cried, "Water. In the name of mercy, water."

The Novakkan studied her briefly, then prodded the wounded man with a huge hand. He was unmoved by the sight of suffering. She got down on her knees and begged, "Give him water. He's dying, but he mustn't die."

"Your husband?" Rahn Buskner asked.

She shook her head.

"Then what is he to you?"

"He's my kind. He fought for me, and I kept him alive for days. Don't let him die now."

The Novakkan was unmoved. "We haven't room for prisoners. Why put life back into him?"

She wanted to go on begging for the man's life, but realized the futility of

it. She remained silent.

The Novakkan turned and departed. The wounded man relapsed into unconsciousness. His pulse became very weak and his forehead burned her hand.

She made up her mind that she would find water if she had to search the ship. After rising unsteadily, she was about to open the bulkhead when Rahn Buskner returned. He handed her a flexible flask and came on into the room.

Hurriedly she lifted the man's head and held the flask to his lips. After a moment Rahn Buskner seized her shoulder and took the flask from her hand. He lifted her to her feet. "Enough for him. You drink."

She was about to protest, but the Novakkan pinioned her hands behind her and placed the mouth of the flask against her lips.

The cool liquid was seductive. She swallowed in great gulps. The Novakkan withdrew the flask long before she'd satisfied her thirst.

When he released her she dropped down beside the man. When she looked up again the Novakkan was gone.

The man's eyes were clearer, but he failed to recognize her. His pulse fluttered; his breathing was little more than gasps.

Keeping life in him had become more important than keeping alive herself. It dominated every thought, every move.

Rahn Buskner returned much later and again allowed the man to drink.

"He needs food," Aleta explained.

The Novakkan shrugged. "He has many needs. To satisfy them is but waste. There is food in the liquid. Nothing else can be given him until he recovers consciousness."

"Let me have a little water to bathe him," she pleaded.

A shadow of emotion appeared on the features of the green-tinged giant, but she couldn't read its meaning. He departed and returned with a plastic basin of water and a cloth. He placed them on the floor beside her and went out.

Careful not to wet the bandages, more careful not to disturb him or cause pain, she worked slowly. His eyes came open and seemed much clearer when she bathed his forehead. He no longer mumbled, no longer called for water.

Rahn Buskner brought her food and stood over her while she ate, preventing her from saving any portion for the man. When he was gone she made shift to bathe herself in the few ounces of water that had not been absorbed into the flesh of the man. Rahn Buskner returned while she was doing this.

"Come," he said.

Not knowing what to expect, she followed him round the right angle passage to a shower room. Numbers of Novakkans were in there bathing. She cringed back in fear, but Rahn Buskner shoved her on into the room, pointing to a vacant shower.

Paralyzed with fear, she could only stand and stare at the floor.

Rahn Buskner seized the smock at the neck and ripped it off her, then pushed her toward the shower. He turned and departed.

The water was soothing to her flesh, but she couldn't avoid the stares of the Novakkans. One of them advanced, stood over her and touched the flesh of her shoulder. She cowered back He came on under the shower, blocking possible escape, seized her arms and drew her toward him.

At that moment Rahn Buskner appeared behind him, holding feminine garments in one hand. He dropped the garments, spun the other Novakkan about and flattened him with a single blow. He unsheathed a knife and placed it against the fallen Novakkan's throat. He spoke in a strange language, determinedly. He gestured toward Aleta. The head of the supine Novakkan bobbed back and forth.

Rahn Buskner stepped back and the other got up and slunk away. After glaring round at the others, Rahn Buskner again departed.

Picking up the garments, she held them

about her and hurried along the passage. Beside the wounded man she examined the garments. They were rich, of the finest silk or synthetic, but made for a woman much smaller. Something in the fibre made it elastic and there was no danger of bursting a seam, but the yellow skirt scarcely fell to her knees.

A slight jolting brought her alert. Three sharp rings sounded, followed by three more. Voices, less strident than before, filled the room. The bulkhead opened automatically and she saw Novakkans hurrying along the corridor. They were dressed in gay colors and without armor, but sheathed at the girdle of each was a long knife and what she recognized as a photonic hand-weapon.

Rahn Buskner appeared in the entranceway, beckoned. "Come."

She nodded toward the wounded man. "I shan't leave him."

Rahn Buskner took the man under one arm as though he weighed but a few pounds and strode out. She hurried along behind him.

"Where are we going?" she wanted to know.

"We've touched down on an Eg planet for repairs," he said.

She held her breath. The Egs were supposed to be allies of Earth, and as such they were not supposed to give sanctuary to Novakkans. But they were traders and not warlike; it was inconceivable that they could keep the Novakkans from stopping. Except on Earth and on the rebellious outposts, the Novakkans went where they would, took what they would, and acted as if they were masters of the universe. At least that was the general belief among Earthlings.

In the airlock Aleta brushed against the Novakkan who had made advances to her in the shower room. She recognized him by his broad and flat nose. Unlike Rahn Buskner, he wore trousers and an upper garment with an insignia on the arm.

She saw numbers dressed in like manner and gathered that they were not fighting men but the crew of the ship. The red eyes of Flat-nose turned on her briefly, swept the lines of her figure, and for a moment she again felt the terror she had experienced in the shower room. She hurried close to Rahn Buskner.

They came out on an open plain and filed into anti-gravity cars which took them to a city under the brow of a towering, snowclad peak. The city had no high buildings, but extended on under the mountain. It swarmed with bearded Egs, bronzed and slender Golgons and people who had migrated from Earth. The Earth men seemed to be derelicts and the Earth women were garish. They showed little interest in the Novakkans other than to stay out of their way.

In a byway between low buildings and a bazaar, Aleta fell behind while studying the scene. Two giant ruffians fell in beside her and one seized her arm. At her cry Rahn Buskner dropped the wounded man and whirled. In a moment he was at her side and one of the men was dead. the other fleeing for his life.

Horrified, Aleta could scarcely keep her trembling legs under her. She wondered when the administration of the planet would avenge the killing. Apparently no one was interested, and Rahn Buskner kicked the body out of their path and pushed her ahead of him.

In primitive quarters across from the bazaar, Rahn Buskner deposited the wounded man on a bed of hides and departed. In a few minutes he returned with a plastic necklace, two bracelets and two anklets.

"Wear these when you go out," he said, stuffing them in a wrist-bag.

Aleta was too busy to take interest. The wounded man's heart was steadier and his breathing easier, but the rough handling in coming from the ship had opened his wounds. She knew she would have to change the bandages without delay.

When she turned, the Novakkan

was gone. The wounds were bleeding and she couldn't wait. Picking up the wrist-bag, she hurried across to the bazaar and found a place that dispensed medicants.

The Eg had no trouble understanding her. He brought out the articles but wouldn't give them to her until he was paid. She opened the wrist-bag. It contained nothing but the necklace, bracelets and anklets. Perhaps, she thought, she could exchange one of these articles.

She brought out the necklace. The Eg stared at the looping ovals engraved on the pendant. His attitude changed instantly. He bowed; he smiled through his beard. He gave her to understand that she could have anything he possessed.

Taking the bandage and antispetic, she dropped the necklace before him and hurried out. He called to her and followed.

"I have lived a good life and am old," he said, "but I do not wish to die. Don't leave the necklace with me. If it were found in my place I would be torn limb from limb." His beard was moist with tears.

She accepted the neckace.

"Place it about your neck," the Eg added, "and none of my race will dare molest you or refuse you anything. But you are to come to my stall. Let the house of Admo serve you whenever you have the slightest wish."

"But what does it mean?"

The Eg bowed. "You belong to the Novakkans of the ship that just touched down. To harm one hair of your head, or to fail to treat you with courtesy, could cause a whole city to be laid waste. Have pity on the Egs. Speak no ill word of us to your masters."

Disturbed both in mind and body Aleta nevertheless took advantage of the moment to ask, "Food? Can you get me liquids for an injured person?"

The Eg of the house of Admo hurried away and returned with containers of concentrates and juices. He would accept no reward but made it clear that he would serve her in any way within his power.

She returned to the wounded man, her heart lighter with the thought that food would enable him to regain his strength. He would not die if she could possibly keep him alive. The idea was becoming an obsession. Somehow he and she must return to Earth, to the things she had known and loved, to the life that was rightly hers, and to Norwich Wyatt whom she had promised to marry.

CHAPTER THREE

THE Eg planet, she soon learned, had no night. It revolved on its axis once in eighteen hours, twenty-six minutes nineteen and a fraction seconds. It had two suns, a red dwarf on one side and a bright yellow star on the other. Both cast their rays on the northern latitudes. For approximately nine hours there was yellow daylight, like false dawn on Earth, and for the remainder of the cycle, rosy twilight, like the last of a sunset.

Both suns were remote and the planet didn't orbit about either. It and six other planets orbited about a long dead star between these two remote suns. It completed its trip around the dead star in a trifle under three months, by Earth reckoning, for the distance between them was scarcely thirty million miles.

Aleta learned these things in the three days she was left alone with the injured man. She learned that a small strip of land was inhabited between the northern mountains and the equator. South of the equator were an endless stretch of glaciers and prepetual darkness.

The seasons consisted of a slight drop in temperature as the planet moved closer to the red dwarf and away from the yellow star, and a slight increase on the return. It averaged fifty degrees Fahrenheit, this in the foothills and on the plains. Snow fell on the mountains, but rain never fell on the lowland. The ground was watered with an almost constant dew and the humidity remained

about ninety-five per cent. Except for electrical disturbances, storms never occurred.

On this single lush strip of land, which would grow grain and hardy perennials without regard to season, half a million Egs lived and carried on profitable trade with neighboring planets. They traded also with Novakkan pirates and grew rich on the booty. But not too rich. Legend told them that when they became very wealthy the Novakkans took away their treasures.

They might have been overrun by immigrants but for the Novakkans. The giants purged the planet whenever they chose, and the population remained constant.

Wearing the necklace, bracelets and anklets, Aleta had no trouble getting everything she needed to put life and strength back into the man who had fought for her.

On the third day he was fully conscious and able to sit up. His name was Ernest Vardon and he had been reared in the foothills of the Ozarks on Earth.

In the rosy twilight of the third day Rahn Buskner returned followed by two Golgons who deposited huge bundles on the floor and departed.

The Novakkan was unsteady on his feet. Fearing what might happen, Aleta hovered over Ernest Vardon as if to protect him. Throughout the nine hours of twilight she kept a vigilant watch. Rahn Buskner slept stretched on the floor.

When the first yellow streaks from the brighter star appeared through vents in the wall she heard him stir restlessly. As the room grew lighter she saw a pool of blood on the floor beside him.

Moving quickly, she stood over the Novakkan and discovered things that had not been visible in twilight. He had a gash in his right thigh, another in his left side, and a new scar on his fierce features, this one cutting across the half-moon scar.

Much as she hated the Novakkans, she couldn't allow his injuries to go unattended. Holding her breath, she kneeled beside him with antiseptic and bandage. She hoped he wouldn't wake, but at the first touch of the antiseptic he bounced up with a roar, knife in one hand, photon gun in the other. For a moment she thought her end had come. But he sank back sheepishly and ignored her as she cleansed his wounds and bandaged them.

Later he rose and ripped open the bundles. From one he brought out an array of feminine finery— enough dresses, gowns and accessories to supply an Earthwoman for years. From another he brought out heaping mounds of jewelry and ornaments, such as she had never before seen. And last he brought out food.

She didn't have to be an expert to know that here was a fortune in jewels and clothes. They had not come from this planet; they had to be his share of booty from the Novakkan raider. The meaning was not yet clear.

She helped him with the food and soon she and Ernest Vardon were eating as they hadn't eaten since leaving earth.

Rahn Buskner made no comment, but glowered at the revived Vardon. She wondered how long it might be before Vardon died at his hands.

To divert his attention, she explained to Buskner that Vardon no longer needed constant attention, demanding her presence, and that she woulld like to have a room for herself.

He glared round until his ruby eyes lit on a connecting door. He inspected it briefly, then smashed it open with his shoulder. While she stared in amazement, he marched on into the adjoining apartments. Screams came from there. She hurried through the doorway in time to see him fling two Egs into the corridor.

She tried to get a close look at the Egs in the hope she could make amends, but they ran away in fright. She turned back in time to see Buskner studying another connecting door. He was about to smash it open when she rushed to his

side and seized his great arm.

"This is enough," she cried. "No more, please."

He shrugged, fingered the bandages she had placed over his wounds. That on his thigh had burst, but the ones on his side and face were in good order.

She tried to make repairs, but he was not in the mood. "A scratch," he said, ripping the bandage off the six-inch gash on his thigh. Dripping blood he turned and strode out into the yellow day.

Within a few days, she knew, Vardon would be up and strong again. Whether the Novakkan would continue to permit him to live was the big question. She determined that somehow they must escape.

Gathering up the rich garments, she folded them neatly and placed them in a niche in the wall. A pair of gold embroidered shoes seemed about her size. She kicked off the great sandals and slipped her feet into them. They were comfortable and the high heels made her over six feet tall. They gave her a feeling of assurance. She decided to wear them.

She moved the mound of jewelry to another niche, and in her mind began to take shape a vague plan. She confided in Vardon.

"With the necklace I can get just about anything. Perhaps I can persuade some friendly Eg to hide you."

He shook his head. "You've told me how fear of the Novakkans dominates the Egs. There's no refuge for us on this planet. We must escape to a spaceway and get passage back to Earth."

"How?" she wanted to know.

He nodded toward the jewelry. "With that we could bribe a ship captain."

She didn't like the idea. The Novakkan might have left the riches there simply to tempt them. Nor did she like the idea of force and killing. She thought they ought to try to outwit their captors. But Vardon was persuasive.

"Go to the house of Admo," he suggested. "Tell him you need a photon weapon for protection. You've told me there are seven planets in this system, three of them inhabited. The next outer planet is on a spaceway. Armed, we may be able to get there."

She didn't like the plan, but it seemed better than nothing.

At the stall of the house of Admo she told the ancient what she wanted. He glanced about nervously, said, "It is not wise for you to go about the city. Another Novakkan raider has touched down and there will be fighting. Even your necklace will not protect you from rival Novakkans."

"That is why I want a photon gun," she said.

The Eg hesitated. "When Novakkan ships are on this planet we are in danger of attack by Earthmen. Word reaches the outer planet and the spaceway communicates it to Earth warships. Earthmen and Novakkans fight whenever they meet."

Aleta remained silent.

The Eg shrugged. "Remain here out of sight. I will return soon."

She followed him to the entrance. For a moment her heart stopped beating. In the pavilion across from the stall were several green-tinged giants. Among them was Flat-nose. He was staring directly at her.

She drew back quickly. Time dragged. The Eg returned. He glanced about cautiously, then handed her a small photon gun. She concealed it in the wrist-bag.

"Have the Novakkans gone from the pavilion?" she asked.

He nodded, said, "I beg that you won't reveal where you got the gun."

She promised and departed.

Before she reached her quarters she saw Flat-nose again. She glanced back as she crossed the byway. He was idling along behind her.

She entered the building and hastened along to her quarters. Partly dressed, and his artificial leg attached, Vardon was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Holding a hand over her heart, she

glanced out through the vent. Flat-nose stood across the byway studying the building.

"Give me the gun," Vardon said. He tried to conceal his weakness, but it was apparent that he was not yet ready for extensive effort.

"No," she said. "A little exercise and then you must go back to bed. Perhaps tomorrow or next day."

He tried hard, but finally gave in.

She glanced out again. Flat-nose was no longer in sight.

Searching among the garments in the niche, she found a skirt that fit her and a blouse with ample sleeves. In the adjoining room she discarded the necklace, the anklets and one of the bracelets. She drew the sleeve of the blouse down over the remaining bracelet.

After glancing in again at Vardon, and making certain there was ample food at hand, she went out softly and drew the door shut.

The byways were not as crowded as hitherto. She gathered that natives remained out of sight in ratio to the number of Novakkans in the city.

Her quarters were close against the foot of the mountain. Now she walked rapidly toward the district sprawled on the plain.

She began to see more Novakkans. Most of them glanced at her willowy figure and passed on. A few stared, and she feared she was going to be approached.

When Golgons or others showed too much interest she slid the bracelet from under the sleeve and let it dangle over her hand. When they recognized it they lost interest quickly.

Far out on the plain she saw many ships. She couldn't make out the markings, but gathered that most of them were traders. Some would be from the nearby planets. The crewmen would seek relaxation in the pleasure houses.

One of them, she determined, would take her and Vardon to a spaceway.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN the Spiral Room of a Vinth garden she asked for employment as a dancer. The Eg stared at her briefly, then his eyes fell to the bracelet. He asked her to wait at one of the tables.

Men at the other tables were tall, broad, rugged. They showed more than casual interest in her, and she in them. Many were Earthmen or descendents of Earthmen, possibly from the planets in the SYZ System.

A small fat Eg came to her table. "I am sorry," he said, "that you wish to dance here. I cannot refuse you and yet I know not whether the Novakkans will approve. In any case, it means trouble. Colonists come here; they don't like the idea of Earthwomen belonging to Novakkans."

"I belong to no one," Aleta said.

"You would not be in possession of that bracelet if Novakkans didn't claim ownership," he pointed out. "Your status is that of a slave but still better than the inhabitants of planets Novakkans trample under their feet. The Novakkans consider themselves above any other creature in the universe."

"Couldn't I be disguised as a Golgon?" she asked.

"Many Golgons are owned by Novakkans."

"But at least," she went on, "it would keep colonists from resenting my being thought of as a slave."

The Eg studied her features and figure. "It is possible," he said. "Dark hair would have to be transplanted, the skin tinted, contact lenses for the eyes. It will take a week."

Aleta shook her head. "I will dance without the bracelet," she said.

The Eg shook his head. "It is my belief that many men will die because of you. But I dare not refuse. Please speak no ill of me to your masters."

In the dressing room she found an abundance of costumes. Two Golgon women helped her and from them she

learned that the fabulous Nyuk would be in the audience in the twilight hours.

"Who is Nyuk?" she asked.

"A man of strange powers," they explained. "Wealthy beyond imagining. It is said that he owns a whole planet. He does not fear the Novakkans. It is because of this that we fear trouble. Like the Novakkans, he takes whatever pleases him."

"He must have a large following," Aleta suggested.

"Nothing but the crew of his ship. It is said to be armed with super weapons. They will avail him nothing if he meets Novakkans here."

Aleta was interested. Too long had she seen only those who cringed before the giants. It was time, it seemed to her, that someone stood up to them.

Because of her height the costume seemed briefer and tighter than she wished. It was made of colors that responded to her emotions. Ordinarily it revealed the neutral tan of tranquillity, but when she got into it the colors became kaleidoscopic.

"The men will be pleased," the Golgons told her. "They do not like emotionless women."

Her cue came. A snowwhite cape was draped about her, hiding the colors. She tried a few ballet movements learned in girlhood, danced out under the spotlight. After a few turns she dropped the robe and went on with more intricate movements. But at no time did she lose herself in the dancing. Her thoughts were on Nyuk. He had been described as a tall, redbearded man whose hair was streaked with gray.

His table was against the wall facing the center of the room. All other tables about him were occupied by equally tall young men, obviously armed, who glanced unobtrusively in his direction from time to time.

She danced near. She made overtures. Looking directly at him, she made up a song to fit the accompanying music, praising his red beard and his courage. At the conclusion of it she threw him a kiss and hastily retreated.

The Golgons told her that Novakkans had come in while she was dancing. She dismissed their apprehension with a wave of her hand. Her object was single.

Before she was again dressed in her own garments one of the young men arrived and sent in word that Nyuk wanted to see her aboard his ship.

"Tell him," she replied, "that Aleta sees only those who come to her."

The result was not what she expected. Gifts were brought and placed before her and she was told that Nyuk would appear at the darkest hour. She had no intention of leaving Ernest Vardon alone until mid-twilight. Calculating rapidly, she decided that she could return to him and be back in time to keep a rendezvous with Nyuk. But she would need help. It wouldn't do to be alone on the byways in twilight.

The small fat Eg offered to send her there in a private float. There was something about it that didn't appeal to her, but she accepted.

The float was equipped with a communicator. Halfway to her quarters she heard it crackle into life. The voice that came through spoke in a language she didn't understand. The operator of the float replied in like manner and then gave her a sidelong glance.

Something about it was disturbing.

At her quarters she leaped out and hurried inside. Before opening the door to the room in which she had left Ernest Vardon she paused briefly. Her heart was beating much too fast. She found it difficult to breathe. Casting aside fears, she pushed open the door and entered.

It was a long moment before she recovered sufficient breath to scream. On the floor sprawled two Egs, a Golgon and a Novakkan. Even at a glance she could tell they were dead.

In the moment her eyes took in the scene they also registered other details. The place was a shambles. The niches in which she had placed the treasure were

empty. The bed in which Vardon had lain was covered with blood. Vardon himself was gone.

As the scream rose in her throat and she started to turn, something soft came down over her head. It was some kind of cloak or other silken wrap. It enveloped her in darkness. A powerful hand went over her mouth and a strong arm went about her body. In the next moment she seemed to be flying through the air.

She struggled very hard, but as her breathing was impeded, her strength waned. Her arms were pinned against her sides by the restraining arm and something else held her legs immobile.

Time fled. There was a sensation of rushing movement, but not as if she were being carried by a running person. She heard strange hollow sounds and later heard echoes of these sounds. It went on and on.

In what seemed to be some remote time and place the sensation of movement ceased. She was lowered to a comfortable couch, but something still restrained her from voluntary movement.

Sounds of voices in strange tongues reached her. The couch moved as though floating. It eventually came to rest and the cloak was withdrawn from about her.

At first she was blinded by the light. It seemed to reflect and sparkle in every direction. Then she realized she was in the center of a vast room, the walls and ceiling of which were crystal.

A man bent over her. He was young and dressed in something like back velvet. His features were such as she had never seen on an Eg. They were cherubic. The beard was lacking, but the square shape of the head and the black slant eyes left no doubt that he was a native of the planet.

She still couldn't move, though nothing visible restrained her.

The man lowered a hand and touched the bracelet. He moved it gently and studied the markings. He nodded to someone behind him, then gently touched her cheek. His fingers moved on to her ear and through the waves of her hair. Then he straightened.

"Release her," he said in her own language.

A bell sounded musically. It was as it something invisible withdrew its grip from her. She sat up, pulled down her skirt and glanced about.

The vast room was richly furnished and ornamented. The light was much brighter than the yellow daylight of outside. It occurred to her that this was the first time she had seen artificial lighting of any knd on this planet which had no night.

"You are the girl Aleta?" the young man asked.

She nodded. "And you?"

"Wilmo the Younger," he said. "I have freed you from the Novakkans. In turn you must repay me. I anticipate many blissful hours in your company, but first you must tell me why the Novakkans kept you alive."

She shook her head. "I don't know."

The young Eg moved closer. "Your stature and charm are such that would appeal to the Novakkans," he went on, "but they do not keep captive women. They ransom them if their value is sufficient to be worth the trouble. This is rare indeed. More often, they use the captive as bait or to exchange for important secrets. I am led to believe that you are the key to something of vast consequence."

Aleta could only shake her head in puzzlement. Norwich Wyatt would ransom her if it were within his power. But she couldn't conceive of herself being considered worth enough to pay her passage back to earth. Not to anyone outside her family and Wyatt.

"I may be mistaken," the young Eg went on. "The Novakkans make use of a few slaves. But with you, I understand, was an incapacitated man. They usually dispose of that kind quickly"

"Ernest Vardon," she said. "Where is he?"

The Eg shrugged. "That is another question that interests me. I am also interested in the booty that was deposited in the apartment. I shall expect you to enlighten me on both subjects."

"But I know nothing about them," she said.

The man's thin lips parted. "It might be wise to recall things about them." He gestured round. "Life can be very pleasant here in the heart of a mountain." He lifted thin shoulders and let them fall. "It can also be exquisitely painful." He lifted a hand in signal to those behind him and again a bell sounded. Again she was unable to move.

As by levitation the couch lifted and moved through a broad archway into a winding corridor. Sitting erect, Aleta could see ahead and to either side. No one accompanied her, and no hand restrained her, but she couldn't move. Some invisible force held her immobile.

The couch passed many vast chambers behind curtained archways. Some of them were occupied by Golgon women, Eg women, and another race of exceptionally delicate beauty. Their skin was lighter than hers, their hair almost as white as that of the Novakkans. They were taller than Golgons and very slender.

At last the couch paused before an archway. The transparent curtains parted. In the midst of the room several exceptionally light-skinned women waited. The couch paused before them and settled gently.

A bell rang and Aleta again was able to move.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALETA tried to escape through the archway. As she approached some increasing force effectively slowed her progress until she could go no farther. The white-skinned women gathered around her.

One said. "It is better to resign yourself."

Aleta had no intention of resigning herself, but pretended to do so in order to learn. The palace, she was told, extended far inside the mountain. None of the women had seen the full extent of it. Wilmo the Younger got in and out by some secret passage. They could not believe that he went about the planet undisguised. And if the Novakkans knew of his wealth they would not rest until they discovered his hiding place. The woman said that he made use of strange science and magic from the far corners of the universe.

From time to time aged Egs, with their long beards, were seen in the palace. But most of the men were beardless.

Aleta's clothes were removed and she was given a masculine costume.

"Wilmo is going to have you questioned," she was told. "He doesn't want your feminine charms to influence the questioners. That means that he has taken a fancy to you himself."

But even in masculine costume, her blonde hair concealed under a turban, there was still no doubt about her sex. The feminine curves would never be mistaken.

The costume was altered to tone down the suggestion of femininity and at last she was escorted through a series of rooms that resembled nothing so much as Earth laboratories. In the larger of these rooms she was questioned closely about Ernest Vardon and the treasure.

She was then questioned for long hours under drugs. And finally a series of electrical instruments were attached to nerve terminals of her body and head and the questioning went on, this time about Earth.

It occurred to her that they were much too interested in the home planet, that somehow they were drawing from her mind a picture of everything she had ever seen or experienced there. The purpose behind it was not clear and it disturbed her.

The questioning was interrupted. A

purple light flashed high up on the wall. The men stared at it briefly, looked at one another. "The snow mesa," one said. Another buckled on a photon gun and stood a moment below the purple light. A panel slid back and he stepped through the opening.

The men seemed nervous, undecided. They moved about fingering weapons. Eventually a knocking sounded. Another stepped below the purple light and called, "Break the beam on your right and the three invisible beams on your left at the same time."

The panel opened and the man who had gone out re-entered. His cheeks were pink. He rubbed his hands vigorously. Wherever he had been was cold. That much was evident. He conferred briefly with the others, then Aleta was escorted back to her chamber.

Observing closely, she memorized the course, bearing in mind that the panel might offer a means of escape.

The masculine clothes were laid aside and she was ordered to array herself in the finest feminine garments. Jewelry was brought and she was allowed to make her own selections. Out of a preference for simplicity she chose only a diamond-studded comb and a single armlet of changing colors.

Eager to learn, what had happened to Ernest Vardon, she was cooperative, and was waiting when Wilmo the Younger entered.

Sitting on the couch side by side, they were carried to a rose-lighted chamber. Apprehension came as Wilmo the Younger's intention became clear. Aleta fought; but how long she might have been able to resist was a doubtful matter until the sounds of loud voices and clamoring reached them.

Wilmo rose quickly, felt for weapons, and discovered that he was unarmed. He lunged toward the archway, recoiled, and staggered back toward her.

Rahn Buskner came on into the room, his vast body towering above the Eg. Clamorous sounds rose in volume. Cries and shrieks reached Aleta's ears.

"We have searched long for this place," said Rahn Buskner, picking up Wilmo by the top of his jacket and flinging him through the archway. He looked at Aleta. "You made nice bait," he said. "And your charms have increased." He fingered the filmy white translucence that covered her body. "Move along," he added. "You'll bring a price on the slave block."

She was marched along the corridor. Ahead of her were prodded a number of cringing Egs. Some twenty Novakkans were with Rahn Buskner. They went from chamber to chamber looting, and screams shrieked through the air when they discovered the quarters of the women.

The women were violated indiscriminately without regard to time and place. The corridor was a madhouse of shrieking females and brutal Novakkans. The sight was so horrifying that the captive Egs turned on their captors.

It occurred to Aleta that this was what the Novakkans wanted. They seemed to prefer fighting even to dalliance with the opposite sex. Their roaring voices were remindful of beasts in zoos. And instead of killing the Egs they crippled them. They broke arms and legs and other bones until their opponents could no longer struggle. Then they rounded up the women again and the orgy continued.

Aleta was spared all but a brief part of the nightmare. Rahn Buskner had taken her in charge.

"This woman," Buskner announced in a thunderous voice, "is part of the booty of the last raid. She goes on the block unspoiled. Should any man touch her in my absence that man shall have his eyes put out, his ears and lips cut away, his skin removed by inches, and then he shall be kept alive in the special chamber aboard ship. If you want her, buy her. Then do what you will with her."

The scenes gave Aleta an inkling

of what her fate might be. The pleas of the helpless women brought nothing but jeering laughter. Some women succeeded in killing themselves. Others were less fortunate. Still others resigned themselves and submitted. And not a few entered into the orgy with what seemed abandon.

The scene was soon left behind. Rahn Buskner led Aleta out of the palace into dark corridors where floats were waiting. In less than an hour she was again out in the rays of the yellow star.

"Where," she asked, "is Ernest Vardon?"

Her question was ignored. In the heart of the city she was escorted into a large building and into an audience chamber where waited an overdressed woman and a Novakkan who wore arm bands.

"The ruse succeeded," Rahn Buskner reported. "Our instrments were attuned to the trinkets I gave her. She discarded most of them but continued to wear one bracelet until it was removed in the mountain place. We knew her location at every moment."

"You are bringing out the wealth?" the other prodded.

"With the exception of minor looting."

"Good." The seated Novakkan eyed Aleta with interest. "She seems to have considerable appeal," he said. "Perhaps—"

The woman sat up straighter. "No, Dral," she said. "Keep to your original plan. The girl Aleta must go on the block. She is part of the loot from the raider."

The Novakkan nodded, turned to Rahn Buskner. "Take prisoner the Eg of the house of Admo, and the other at the Vinth garden. Round up all who helped her."

Aleta's breathing became difficult. "What," she asked, "are you going to do with them?"

The Novakkan speculated briefly. "Have them dismembered unless you can suggest a more pleasant way of disposing of them."

"But they're guilty of nothing except being friendly," she went on. "There's no justice in punishing them."

"We have reason to believe that they kept Wilmo informed of our movements," he pointed out. "It is possible that Wilmo has brought Earth warships here in the past to attack us." He looked at Rahn Buskner. "Take her away," he added.

Aleta raised her voice. "What happened to Ernest Vardon?" she demanded.

"Her lover!" the woman jeered. "Tell her what is to happen to him."

"Take her away," the Novakkan repeated. "To the block."

Aleta moved as in darkness. It didn't seem real that indirectly she had caused so much suffering and death. And there was more to come.

The part about it that pained her most was that she was helpless to fight back. All her life she had been moved at the whims of men or the needs of war. Something within her rebelled. The cunning part of her brain worked feverishly. Somehow she would avenge the deaths and the indignities.

The sense of helplessness rose. She tried to counter it with the thought that right must triumph over might, but the pages of history were covered with the denial. Might was the force that prevailed from the beginning. Sometimes it was allied with Right. Just as often it moved blindly.

There was order in the universe. The law of it was that the strong shall prevail.

Then, she told herself, she would become strong. She would become as ruthless as the men who held her prisoner. By every cunning born in her sex, by every wile and strategem she had ever learned, she would fight back. Somewhere in the course of events an opportunity would come.

She was taken to a large platform about which were gathered vast numbers of nearly every race she could name. Minutes passed before her eyes were clear enough to distinguish individual faces. Then she saw Ernest Vardon.

His artificial leg had been removed. The toll taken by his injuries still showed. During her capture by Wilmo he must have relapsed. Now he was little more than a grim shadow.

Her heart ached with pity. She started to move toward him, but was restrained. He, too, was on the platform, surrounded by Novakkans.

She was pushed to the center. All but two Novakkans fell back from about her. The one nearest spoke in a strange tongue and with gestures. He seemed amused about something.

The eyes of the audience, she noted, were on her. Not a few seemed unduly interested in her figure, gowned, as it was, in filmy transparence.

The second Novakkan spoke in her own language. "We are now open for offers. She is taller than most Earthwomen, of extraordinary beauty, a plaything worthy of a Novakkan." He glanced at her. "Could be made useful, too. Very apt at attending wounds, and our calling keeps us abundantly supplied with such. Think how pleasant it would be to return from a raid with your throat cut, your guts spilling out through body wounds, and to have a creature like that stick you back together again."

There was a chorus of laughter.

"But I need not extol her virtues," the Novakkan went on. "A lusty female strong enough to be an interesting playmate even for a Novakkan, strong enough to endure for weeks, possibly months. Golgon women and the fragile light-skinned girls lose their spirit after a day or two, as do most Earthwomen. But here is value incomparable. Worth fighting over. What am I offered?"

The bidding began with enthusiasm, grew heated. Aleta was revolted.

"Strip her," one huge Novakkan roared. "Let us see what we're buying."

As the man beside her reached to tear the filmy wraps from her body, Aleta glimpsed Ernest Vardon out of the corner of an eye. As he had stood between her and the lustful men on the lifeship so now he attempted to come to her aid. His artificial leg unattached, he could only hop. And he hadn't much strength even for that. Only his courage was still at flood tide.

His first effort brought only a mild cuffing. His second and third efforts caused him to be instantly surrounded by green-tinged giants, who hammered him to the floor of the platform.

Blindly Aleta fought. She couldn't see what she was doing, but felt her nails sink into flesh, knew that she was kicking and screaming. Something smashed against her cheek again and again. They were, she discovered, blows from the open palm of a Novakkan hand, and they almost knocked her senseless.

Rahn Buskner leaped forward. His knife touched the throat of the man who had done the slapping.

"This girl is part of the booty," he growled. "You damage her and you rob every man on the raider of part of his share of the spoils."

"Cut his throat, Buskner," shouted someone in the audience, and others soon took up the cry.

Other armed Novakkans leaped to the platform. Knives gleamed in a dozen hands. Order was restored.

"Go on with the sale," an officer ordered. "And the next man that bruises that girl before he has bought her will be dismembered. She is property. Sell her and then let her owner bruise her as he will."

The bidding resumed. The flat-nosed man who had approached Aleta in the shower aboard the raider pushed his way to the front. "I bid half my

share of the spoils in the last raid," he said.

From far back in the audience another voice sounded. "I bid a small pleasure cruiser capable of reaching Earth and return," it said. Aleta's eyes found the source, recognized Nyuk. Scores of Novakkan eyes turned and glared at him.

No Eg had thus far bid. In fact, none seemed willing to bid against a Novakkan.

"I offer three fourths of my share of the spoils," Flat-nose added.

Rahn Buskner stepped forward. "The girl has been in my care. I want her. Take my share of the spoils and an equal amount of wealth I have stored away. Give me the girl. I have a right ahead of others because I induced her to wear the trinkets that enabled us to discover Wilmo and his treasure."

"I will double any sum offered," said Nyuk.

Somebody pointed at him. "That man is not a Novakkan. Give him the girl. It will provide us immediate prey when his ship attempts to leave the planet."

Laughter sounded, but there was grimness about it. And Nyuk seemed to understand then that if he bought the girl he would not live to carry her away. "I withdraw my bid," he said.

More laughter sounded, then Flat-nose roared, "I offer wealth in excess of that of Buskner. I want that girl."

"We are not interested in wealth," another Novakkan said, "which is stored away. Every man must bid what he has here and now, so that the spoils may be divided."

"My full share of the spoils," said Rahn Buskner.

"Mine is equal to his," said Flat-nose. "I offer it."

The officers on the platform conferred. When they turned back there was bitter amusement in their faces. "We have a way out of the dilemma," one announced. "Two men offer their full share of the spoils. The girl is worth it. Let them pool their wealth and buy her between them."

"And," another thundered, "let them settle between them who shall own her."

Merriment went round, and then cries of, "Let them fight to the death for her."

The idea met with approval on every side. Buskner was asked if he accepted the decision. He nodded. So also Flat-nose.

"Then we will make a holiday," said an officer. "Each man to be stripped and armed equally. We will ring a space. Both men shall enter. Only one may come out. The girl will be there in view so that he can see what he is fighting for."

CHAPTER SIX

ALETA shivered. The thin garments that covered her flesh had been torn to shreds. No one moved to put a wrap about her.

"The winner of the fight will warm you," one Novakkan told her. "His blood will be running out and it will be hot."

They brought an elaborate seat and placed her there in full view. The men below cleared a space, stood in a circle. The two contestants shed their clothes and marched to the center of the circle. Neither was armed.

An officer gave instructions. "There before you," he said, "is the prize. Well worth fighting for. Shall we toss her in the ring beside you, or leave her in view?"

"Leave her there," Rahn Buskner said.

"Toss her in the ring," Flat-nose said.

The officer made the decision. "Move her close. Let her see that the man who wins her is worthy of her charms."

The seat on which Aleta sat was shoved closer to the ring. She could

not take her eyes off the figures of the green-tinged giants. It seemed unreal that one of them would soon be lying dead and that she would be in the bloody arms of the other. She closed her eyes, but the vision remained.

"There is to be no mercy," the officer went on. "Only one may leave that ring. The other must be dead. Toss them knives."

Aleta opened her eyes in time to see two blades flash through the air. They were caught expertly by the opponents.

Briefly the giants circled. Flat-nose moved swiftly, slashing upward with his knife. He lost an ear as a result. It instantly dawned that Flat-nose had not expected to win. He was no match for Rahn Buskner. The reason for his acceptance of the challenge wasn't clear. Not immediately.

They continued circling. Then Buskner closed in. It looked as if the fighting would be over in a moment. Flat-nose was bleeding from several wounds. He backed away, circled. And then Aleta saw the strategy.

Flat-nose had not expected to win in the ordinary way. From her position high on the platform she saw scores of knives unsheathed. They were in the hands of Novakkans whose garments differed from the garments of those on the ship that had held her prisoner. She concluded that the men were from the second Novakkan raider.

She saw the knife raised behind Rahn Buskner's back. In another moment it would plunge down and she would belong to Flat-nose. Nothing had been said about fair play. She gasped the whole thing in an instant.

She hated the Novakkans and everything they stood for, but something within her surged against the killing that was about to take place. She screamed with all her might. "Rahn Buskner! Behind you."

The giant who had told her that he led boarding parties showed now why he had been chosen for that task. He moved from under the descending blade, bent low, whirled and disemboweled the man who had sought to stab him.

Instantly Flat-nose was on him and his back was laid open from shoulder to waist. But Rahn Buskner did not go down. It was evident that he had friends in the gathering. They rallied about him now. In another moment the fighting was general and such as Aleta had never seen.

The Novakkans were known for their ferocity and cruelty. So far as she knew, these had always been displayed against other races. Now it was Novakkan against Novakkan. Blood spurted and flowed. They fought like demons. They knew neither mercy nor fear, and were never content with merely wounding. They killed. They stabbed and cut until the last breath ceased.

Photon guns flashed. But in the mob these killed friend and enemy alike. They were not used indiscriminately except by those mortally wounded who insisted on taking others with them into death.

Aleta did not take in the full scene. The thing that held her fascinated gaze was Rahn Buskner as the blood streamed from the wound in his back. It was as if he knew that life was going out of him and that he must kill Flat-nose before he died.

Flat-nose had no way to retreat. The mob was all about him. He had to stand and fight, and the sight of the blood flowing from Rahn Buskner gave him courage.

With his back against the platform, at Aleta's feet, he stood his ground. Rahn Buskner came on, staggering slightly. They both struck at the same time. And each buried his knife to the hilt. Flat-nose struck downward and the blade entered the muscles of Rahn Buskner's chest. Rahn Buskner struck upward. His blade went through Flat-nose's stomach and came out his back. Nor did it stop. It cut upward.

Then Flat-nose was lying gurgling at the foot of platform, and Rahn Buskner was reeling and plucking at the haft of the knife buried in the muscles of his chest.

Aleta saw no more. A hand went over her mouth. She was lifted bodily from the seat, and then she was aboard a float.

No Novakkan moved to stop her. They were too busy fighting. And when the cry went up the float was already lofting.

She turned and looked into the eyes of redbearded Nyuk.

"I bid," he said, "merely to let you known that I meant to rescue you. I was aware that the Novakkans would not permit another to walk off with their prize. But Nyuk takes what he desires."

"You hope to escape the Novakkans?" she asked. "You know, of course, they will cross the galaxy to avenge what they deem a wrong?"

He nodded. "I have outwitted the Novakkans before. Rest assured. Soon we will be aboard my ship and well into space."

It was preferable to being in the hands of the Novakkans, but Aleta was by no means assured. More killing, she feared, lay ahead.

She made no resistance when they reached the ship. Getting off the planet was paramount now. Later, she thought, she would persuade Nyuk to take her to a spaceway.

She was assigned luxurious quarters, to which Nyuk returned after the ship got underway.

"Do you know what happened to Ernest Vardon?" She described the man who had defended her well in the lifeship but who had gone down under the blows of the Novakkans on the platform.

Nyuk shook his head. "I was interested only in you," he admitted. "That and in laying my plans."

"Where are you taking me?"

"You reminded me," he said, "that the Novakkans will cross the galaxy to avenge what they think is a wrong. It is necessary for me to take you to a place where I can stand off their ships."

"Stand off Novakkan raiders? You must have a fleet to support you!

"I have weapons," he said, "and wits. I also rule a planet. Sparsely populated and small, but a planet."

"Is it right to bring the Novakkans down on the population of a planet," she reasoned, "because of me?"

"Of what are the creatures of a planet except to afford such as I defense and pleasure?"

Then she knew that she was going to hate Nyuk. And yet, a few hours earlier, she had told herself that she would become ruthless. She had vowed to destroy her finer self, starve the feelings of compassion, sympathy, pity, mercy, in order to halt the madness loose in the universe.

Out of some vague rage against brute force she had thought for a moment that she could right things by using wiles and strategems to make brute force destroy brute force. Now it dawned that that was precisely what she was doing. She was setting one force against another.

The thought didn't bring a sense of relief. Above all things, she wanted to stop suffering rather than cause it.

Nyuk sent in exquisite garments brought from far corners of the galaxy. They had various effects on their wearer. Certain garments would make her cheerful, almost ecstatically happy, in a sort of hypnotized way. Others would make her serene. Still others roused uneasy passions.

These things she had to learn by experience. And it took quite a while for her to associate the changes in her moods with the garments. Then she was careful to wear only those that brought tranquillity.

Although she had no way of judg-

ing their velocity Aleta thought that they reached their destination in surprisingly short time. She had slept seven times and lost count of meals when she was informed that they were down.

They could hardly have got out of the Eg System, she concluded. The important thing was whether they had moved in or out, for outward was the spaceway. If they were close to the dead star that held the planets in the system, possibility of return to earth would be more remote.

She followed Nyuk down the ramp into darkness, their way lighted by beams coming from instruments in the hands of the crewmen. The air was thin and cold. Nyuk hastily bundled her in a long heavy coat and pressed her on toward what appeared, when the beams struck it, to be a forest. When they reached it she saw that it was a tangle of trees and growth hiding an unbroken wall.

They moved along the wall. The crewmen formed in a line on either side and eventually paused. Then the trees melted into one another and the wall opened into a corridor. Inside, they went through opening after opening. Each succeeding corridor was brighter and richer in colors.

They arrived in what appeared to be an endless garden. Above appeared long reaches of blue and gray. Close study revealed a dome colored to simulate clouds and sky.

In the midst of the garden was what seemed to be a maze built on a gigantic scale. It turned out to be roofless corridors, vast chambers and sleeping rooms. Richly furnished, it was a palace without towers or spires or gables. Its roof was the simulated sky and clouds.

"The sleeping chambers," Nyuk explained, "can be darkened separately."

"But there are two opposed suns in this system," Aleta said. "There should be light all the time."

"Only in the northern latitudes."

"But the remainder of the planet should be too cold to sustain life."

Nyuk took her into a room that had a mock-up of the system. "We are close to the dead star," he explained. "It reflects back dark rays which create heat in our atmosphere. It modifies life, but there's nothing new about it. Many kinds of life survive better in darkness. Our race belongs to the light world. But the longer we remain here the more adapted we become to darkness."

"Where do you get food?"

"Some of the most nourishing foods grow in darkness. We have our own cultures as well as access to the northern latitudes where other food is grown."

"And this is why you don't fear the Novakkans?"

Nyuk drew himself up to his full height of more than six feet. "The Novakkans," he said, "are largely brute. They are cunning in many ways, but no match for superior intelligence."

"I'm beginning to understand," Aleta went on. "And understanding gives me hope. Perhaps you will do something for me no one else could do."

"There are limits," he admitted. "But many obstacles can be overcome. What is it?"

She puzzled on how to phrase her request. "I would like to know," she said, "how my people are faring on Earth. And I would like to know what has happened to Norwich Wyatt."

Nyuk studied her, his expression unchanging. "Are you in love with Wyatt?"

She tried to conceal her emotions. "I am engaged to marry him," she admitted.

After reflection, Nyuk said, "It will take time, but I may be able to get the information. We will see."

In a hangar which could be opened to the outside would he showed her the light cruiser.

"It is fast and armed," he said. "but would be no match for a raider. The

wonder of it is that it can be operated by one man. The time may come when I will have to escape alone from this planet."

Aleta studied his eyes. They didn't show fear at the thought that he might have to escape alone. They showed cunning. She got the idea that in a crisis he would desert his followers without regret.

He talked of sights on the planet that could be seen from the cruiser. But the danger of raiders having the planet under surveillance kept him from taking the cruiser aloft.

He had other reasons, she gathered for remaining in the palace. Egotistical to the extreme, he seemed to feel that in time she would welcome his amours. He showered her with gifts, rare garments, strange perfumes and jewelry, placed servants at her disposal, and provided entertainment of such fascinating variety that she feared he might on day find her in a mellow mood.

She diverted his thoughts by showing wonder and childlike interest in the things he did for her. She kept him busy providing new things of interest. But the time would come, she knew, when he would tire of being a suiter and demand his place on her couch.

The thought disturbed her. He didn't appeal to her, and her own longing was to return to Earth and Norwich Wyatt where she might again seek the happiness that was rightly hers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE day came when quiet fear spread through the palace. The womenservants who attended her spoke in hushed whispers. Their movements were hesitant, uncertain. Now and then she heard breathed the word that roused the fear.

"Novakkans!"

She, too, feared, but having been a prisoner of the dread race, was not as moved as others. A picture of Ernest Vardon seeking to come to her aid on the slave platform would crowd other things from her mind. She would never forget the sight of him tottering on one leg and striving to reach her. The blows that clubbed him down seemed to strike her own body.

Her reaction to the news that raiders hovered over the planet was hate. She earnestly hoped that they would be blasted out of the cosmos, but the fear about her gave her little reason to believe that such might come to pass.

Tales of Novakkan raids reached her. In the past they had had swooped down on the defenseless populace killing and destroying where they found nothing worth carrying away. Nyuk had finally organized a system of defense. But fighting Novakkans was considered hopeless.

The fear was greater because this time they hadn't come as mere raiding parties. Squadrons circled the planet and each day their number increased. It wasn't the way of Novakkans except upon a mission of vengeance.

Stories were told of how the surface of other planets had been scorched. Few escaped alive when the green-tinged giants were out not for booty but for blood.

Inhabitants of the planet who lived outside came to the palace and begged admittance. Nyuk admitted the strong who would be of use in defending the place, but turned away the weak.

His counselors advised him, Aleta learned, to cruise about the planet and broadcast words of assurance. He dismissed the advice on the grounds that he was too busy arranging his own defense.

As time passed the servants became more and more agitated. Ordinarily they kept Aleta informed of what was going on outside, but now they suddenly ceased talking.

One fragile Eg woman, who confided that when she was young and appealing she had been stolen from an outer

planet and sold to Nyuk's father, entered Aleta's private chamber when she was alone.

"You must see the master and have him arrange a special guard," she told Aleta. "A rumor has spread that the Novakkans are gathering because of you. The people outside are clamoring to have you brought out and given to the Novakkans so that the planet may be spared."

Aleta could understand he woman's fear, but realized the futility of the thought that the raiders could be appeased. They would not be satisfied with anything less than the blood of Nyuk. She didn't put the thought into words. She understood that the woman meant she was in danger from the populace.

It occurred to her that if Nyuk would take her aboard ship and try to escape the planet might be spared. A vague plan began to form. She sent a request for an audience.

Hours passed and then she was summoned. Nyuk was no longer amorous, he was occupied with the grim business of strengthening his defenses.

"I've neglected you out of necessity," he said. "This state of affairs will have to continue for the present. Later, I assure you, I shall demonstrate that I'm not unappreciative of your charms."

Aleta made no pretense. "There may not be any later," she said, "unless you do something now. It was a mistake to bring me here. We must escape together in your cruiser."

He shook his head. "And where would you hide?"

"On one of the outer planets, one that isn't inhabited."

Again he shook his head. "My father before me held this planet. I shall hold it."

"Against Novakkan raiders? They've ringed the planet like an Earth blockade fleet."

"And you think we could get through the ring?"

"We could try. It would spare the populace here."

His smile was bitter. "When I took you Novakkan blood flowed like water. You didn't cringe or wince. Why so tender now?"

"The populace is defenseless."

"But I," Nyuk asserted, "am not defenseless. I assure you that when those raiders come down they will receive a surprise the like of which has never been witnessed in this galaxy. I've long sought to lure them here. I paraded my wealth. I went among them and acted as arrogantly as they. But they assumed they could brush me aside whenever they wished. Or perhaps they feared me. It no longer matters. I have given them cause to seek vengeance. and they are gathering to move into the trap."

Thought of the helpless populace drove Aleta to make one more plea. "Take me away," she said. "The Novakkans come to avenge the humiliation they suffered when you took me from under their eyes. Believing this, I can never know happiness if I bring death and misery to innocent creatures."

Nyuk smiled. "You would be happy if I took you away?"

Aleta tried to put sincerity into her voice, but the words came out in a hesitant tremolo: "I will try to be. I will try very hard."

"I am pleased to learn that you can be happy with me," he said unemotionally, "because I must bring you bad news. I've hesitated to tell you before. but now—"

"News from Earth?" she said quickly.

"From Earth, yes."

Norwich Wyatt? Is he all right."

"In the best of health."

"Then what?"

"Try to take it calmly," he said. "You're an orphan."

"I—I don't understand."

"Raids from space. Possibly Novakkans. They struck where your

people lived. They were among the casualties."

"Dead?"

He nodded. "That is the best information I've been able to get. Both your mother and father."

The room seemed to spin. Aleta spoke quickly. "My sister and brother?"

"Brother paralyzed by a spinal injury. I didn't want to tell you that. The shock seems to have affected your sister mentally and emotionally. She's to be sent out to Mars along with the other ineffectives."

"You're sure there's no mistake?"

He shrugged. "There is always that posssibility. But I wouldn't advise you to build hope."

She couldn't grasp it. Mother and father dead. Dave and Mae ineffectives. They needed her now. They needed her as they had never needed anyone.

"Can you get a message to Norwich Wyatt to get me transportation back to Earth?"

Again Nyuk shrugged. The hopelessness of the situation dawned over her. For a moment she had forgotten herself.

"Wyatt," Nyuk said, "seems to be away from the planet. He was in good health when he left."

"A message could be forwarded to him," she went on desperately. "I must get back to Earth."

Nyuk shook his head. "You've been gone from the planet for quite a while. It is presumed there that you are dead. That should make it easier for you to accept what I must tell you. Norwich Wyatt will hardly care to be interrupted. He is honeymooning."

"What?"

He explained again. Still the words hardly registered. Norwich Wyatt was her fiance. He would come for her if he knew where she was. Nothing else seemed to make sense, but the words were in her mind and kept repeating themselves. She didn't remember returning to her own quarters.

Armed men moved through the palace. They guarded the entranceways and allowed no one to enter or leave without special permission. They drilled the servants in emergency activities. Aleta moved through the routine in a semi-trance. What she was ordered to do seemed to have no meaning. At the ringing of a bell in a certain key she was to follow a dimly lighted passage to a dead-end. That was all. It didn't make sense. She responded as an automaton. But as the weight of grief and hopelessness diminished in her leaden body, her mind cleared and again she took interest in her surroundings.

As far back as she could remember, she had been highly sensitive. Without willing herself to do so, she would become aware of the emotional attitude of others, of the harmony or disharmony surrounding her. The clashing of poorly blending colors would disturb her. Abruptness in a room or a scene or in dress brought a sense of irritation.

As this acuity came back, she knew that something was out of order. This was not simply defense of a planet from raiders. For some reason Nyuk had deliberately lured the Novakkans here. No defense she had seen could possibly withstand their attack when it came. And yet she could not believe that Nyuk was intentionally making a suicidal stand for the glory of it. He expected, she believed, not only to survive, but to deal the raiders a blow from which they would be long in recovering.

But how? And what about the populace?

It would be impossible for the innocent to escape when the fighting began. They would die like insects under a spray.

And there was terror outside the walls of the palace. No one could doubt. Clamoring at the gates was in-

cessant. The little people knew their predicament. They were caught between two implacable enemies. And they had no way to turn.

This was the real horror for Aleta. Her sensitive nature understood how they felt in their helplessness. And her mind searched for some means of aiding them.

Before she could formulate any plan the first attack came. She learned about it from the servants. The Novakkans descended against little resistance and seized a broad area halfway around the planet. It appeared that they knew where resistance would be encountered and avoided this side of the planet in the preliminary stages.

She watched some of the fighting on visicon until the scenes sickened her. As always, the Novakkans swept everything before them. They killed and destroyed without thought of mercy. They polluted food and laid waste villages and cities in the sunlit regions. They spread about the planet, moving always toward the dark side.

Their ships remained inexorably in a blockading encirclement above the surface. Only a few descended in the first attack. And their numbers out in space grew. It was evident that vengeance was to be taken in the full-scale Novakkan manner. They would leave little, if any, life on the planet.

Her own helplessness disturbed Aleta more than her fear. Virtually a prisoner, she could do nothing to alleviate suffering outside the palace. And except that tension grew with each passing hour, life went on here as usual.

She stopped watching the scenes, but this did not relieve her conscience. She felt that she was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the suffering, and her mental anguish became greater than physical.

It was almost a relief when the fighting reached the dark side. Out of some curious sense of justice, she felt that the palace should receive its full share of Novakkan vengeance, if vengeance had to be dealt. Here was the cause. She and Nyuk. Living in luxury while the little people suffered and died. Surrounded by walls. Protected by armed men and supposedly super weapons.

The fighting moved inexorably closer. The scenes on the dark side, she learned when she could no longer remain away from the visicom, were as clear as those that had been brought from the sunlit side. They were not photographic. They were picked up in some other manner.

And then she learned that the simulated forest which camouflaged the palace was literally jammed with refugees. They were dying by the thousands from exposure, starvation, disease and wounds. And she was helpless.

"Nyuk," she finally told him, "you've got to do something to stop this."

His features were grim, his eyes red from loss of sleep. "Just when I've got them in a trap?" he snarled. "All my adult life I've waited for this day."

"But the populace? They are dying a thousand to one!"

He turned away and it occurred to her that his obsession for vengeance was on a level with that of the Novakkans. It was not rational. The real shock came then. His defense might be as impractical as his thought of luring the raiders into a trap. She could not conceive of any weapon or maneuver that could save either him or her.

The summons came while she was resting.

"Be careful," the Eg woman warned. He's in a fiery temper. He killed three servants for begging him to allow their kin to enter the palace."

Nyuk was indeed in a fiery temper, she realized when she looked into his eyes, but outwardly calm.

"You understand clearly what you are to do when the emergency alarm is sounded?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"You will demonstrate in my presence."

He accompanied her back to her quarters. The bell rang in the key that she recognized as her own signal. Leisurely she went along the passage to the dead-end, waited.

He followed and when she turned to him again his eyes were blazing.

"You'll have to move faster than that," he snapped.

"But the passage leads nowhere," she pointed out. "What's the use in hurrying there to wait?"

Summoning guards, he said, "Put her through the drill. If she lingers use a whip with silken lashes."

It didn't make sense. Over and over she responded to the ringing of the bell. Over and over she stood at the dead-end and waited. Nothing about it seemed different from the other passages except that it was dimly lighted.

She resented being driven, but was not foolish enough to display her feelings. Instead, she tried to discover what it was all about.

Questions brought only head shaking from the guards. Eventually she concluded that they didn't know any more than she.

And this brought the final shock.

It dawned slowly, and then with great impact, that only Nyuk knew what defense was going to be made, what steps would be taken for protection of the palace, and who was to die and who was to survive.

She was certain that he didn't hope to hold the palace. She was equally certain that he meant to survive. But she was not certain that he intended for anyone to survive with him.

This sense of uncertainty, she became aware, was rapidly spreading through those about her.

Succeeding hours became nightmares of dread.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE Novakkans struck suddenly From directly above the palace the ships spiraled down, their photonic weapons burning the forset and scorching the area for hundreds of miles in every direction, but except for a slight rise in temperature the interior of the palace remained unchanged.

The soft-toned bell sounded as Aleta watched the scenes in the view. She rose as an automaton and marched to the dead-end and remained motionless.

The floor moved beneath her feet. Her senses told her she was standing on something like rubber and that it was stretching first one way and then another. Then Nyuk appeared.

He was not beside her nor in her presence in a tri-dimensional way. He was within the wall. The sight and the thought made her think she had lost her reasoning.

Nyuk moved and part of the wall moved with him.

Aleta grasped that some kind of gravity warp had gone into effect and that she was in the presence of a new dimension.

Then she and the floor on which she stood moved in rhythm with Nyuk. It was as if substance had become soluble in relation to certain other substance, for the palace remained as it had been, its floor overlapping the one on which she stood. She moved through solid matter.

Nyuk extended a hand, clasped hers. His hand was cold and now had a metallic touch.

In the next moment a brilliant flash of white spread outward from the dead-end. That it was an explosion she had no doubt, but she felt nothing but a slight warmth, as under a ray-lamp.

Other explosions occurred a few feet away and then she realized that she was truly in another dimension watching what was taking place in the palace.

At the sight of Novakkans she shivered, clung tighter to Nyuk's hand. They appeared from everywhere, looked directly at her, but were solely con-

cerned with protecting themselves from the heat of the smoldering ruins while they searched for something they couldn't find.

The palace was levelled progressively. Nyuk remained unmoved. He spoke and his voice had a metallic ring: "We are quite safe, but we must move a few yards. I'm going to destroy the Novakkans. There is danger of breaking the field that protects us."

They moved slowly through what appeared to be solid matter in solution. A wall before them crumbled and then she saw the armed men of the palace desperately defending themselves, making their last stand.

The Novakkans had trapped them in a broad corridor. Weapons such as she had never seen came into play. The palace men actuated beams of light from wall to wall and wherever a Novakkan touched a beam he staggered back with an arm or part of his body gone.

Glowing red pellets, no larger than a match-head, showered down from what was left of the simulated sky, and burned holes through bodies.

Gravity fields went into effect to throw the attackers off balance, but because they wore little armor they were hardly more affected than the defenders.

In close quarters the Novakkans avoided the use of rays. Their main weapon seemed to be the eighteen-inch knives they carried at their girdles. Their skirts were ripped off and used as shields, and then Aleta realized that they were impervious to the red pellets and to some of the lesser rays.

Ignoring their losses, the Novakkans pushed on and cut the defenders down.

Aleta thought that Nyuk's place was there with the defenders, but he merely looked on with a grim smile. Life meant nothing to him. In that respect he differed in no way from the green-tinged giants. In another way he was as far removed at the stars. The Novakkans liked fighting. They would, she knew, cross the galaxy to avenge a wrong. Nyuk liked killing in a more detached manner. He would use elaborate schemes and science to trick an enemy; but it was impossible to picture him in hand-to-hand combat.

As she moved along beside him, she touched a hand to her cheek, was astonished at how metallically cold it felt. Her weight seemed to have increased. And she couldn't keep herself from hesitating when she approached an object, nor could she entirely control the sense of eeriness as she walked through objects.

Their progress was downward, deeper into the solid substance of the planet. Her weight continued to increase. On looking up she saw what, she knew, she had thought of as the surface of the planet. It was startling for a different reason.

Things on the surface, which couldn't have been more than a hundred feet overhead, appeared tiny. The green giants now seemed hardly three feet tall. She turnd to Nyuk, her features mirroring an expression of awe and horror.

His expression was grim, apprehensive. "Attenuation," he said. "We can carry it only so far. Our volume is greater, but our density has decreased. We don't pass through objects; they pass through us. Time, I think, is accelerated. We may age very fast. An hour will seem shorter, material objects smaller."

"But where are we going?"

He avoided a direct answer and she gathered that he was in doubt about future events.

"We will find out soon," he said. "Only once have I gone farther than this and that was when I was a child. My father told me of the dangers, but said that I would someday have to make use of his science. His laboratory is directly under our feet."

It was true. The substance about them was translucent. She could make

out objects below in a series of huge vaultlike rooms. As they advanced they sank through substance into those rooms.

The experience defied description. The illusion was that of sinking into water, but there was no increase in external pressure and their weight was supported solely by their feet.

At last they stood on a cushiony floor that no longer allowed them to sink. Nyuk drew a breath of relief, released her hand and moved to controls on a white panel. He turned to her.

"We are going to look," he said, "at a cosmic secret." His hand was unsteady as he reached toward the control. "There is no way back. Where the palace was is now a lethal field, gradually decreasing the oxygen content in the atmosphere. In a few hours nothing will be alive in a radius of a hundred miles. In a few weeks no life will exist on the planet."

The carnal horror of it made Aleta wish that she had died back there in the palace or out in space in the lifeship. Nyuk she grasped, was not human. The Egs, the Golgons, the tall, slender pale women, the Novakkans, all were human or had evolved essentially as humans evolved, so far as she could gather. Not even the Novakkans would erase all life on a planet. Only Nyuk—!

And only Nyuk, she felt, had ever unveiled the secret of attenuation of atomic structure in organic matter.

Fear shuddered through her, and with it came the thought that she, too, might not be human. Some vast change had taken place. Here, actually inside substance, she thought that she could feel the throb of life itself in the planet. There was a gentle pulsing about her. In the atmosphere, or whatever served to replace the atmosphere they had left on the surface, was a sense of communion, as if living *thought* flowed in every direction.

It seemed that she had become part of the substance around her, part of its field of energy, and that, with her, it resented this violation of its secrets and its innermost being.

She wondered how long it would be before she would lose her ability to reason.

"There is no way back," Nyuk repeated, "but there is a way on out or deeper in the direction we're going. I must try to remember the things my father told me."

His hand moved the control, went on moving it. For a moment nothing happened, then the floor on which they stood, the walls of the rooms, the substance overhead, took on depth, and bright points of light began to show.

The light moved in flashes so small they could hardly be registered by the eyes, flashes that were continual, endless. They stretched away to infinity in very direction.

The import dawned, and it was the final blow. Aleta's knees trembled, gave beneath her. She sat on the floor and held herself upright with her hands.

From where the sudden knowledge had come she had no idea, but she was certain that she was looking at *energy* in motion.

CHAPTER NINE

"AT the moment we must remain here," Nyuk said. When our position is exactly right relative to our destination we will move on." He glanced upward and it seemed to Aleta that he saw something she had missed.

His explanation about going on was not clear. She grasped that it had something to do with the motion of the planet. What interested her was his sudden ashen pallor. She was also disturbed by strange vibrations in the earth.

Following his gaze, she looked up. Scarcely larger than ants to her eyes, Novakkans worked on the surface. Not precisely the surface; they were down

many feet.

Without warning she experienced the same kind of tremor she had experienced on the lifeship when the Novakkans were sealing a chamber about the airlock.

The situation was much the same. Somehow the Novakkans knew their quarry was below ground. They were drilling and burning their way down.

Nyuk's features grew more ashen. And Aleta was certain that hers were the same color. She made no effort to rise. Her nerves had been tense so long that exhaustion had overcome her. She relaxed, stared about her and studied the laboratory.

Hanging as in space, but actually from the ceiling in an adjoining room, visible as in the background of a picture, were miniature planetary systems, great colored cosmographs, and endless mathematical symbols. Books stood on shelves that seemed to have no end, and she recognized spools and audio equipment which would enable students to learn while sleeping. A treasure-trove of knowledge, just beyond the wall, visible to her eyes.

Sometime later Nyuk swore lightly and breathed an exclamation. Again she followed his gaze.

The Novakkans had made progress. Their work still made the earth vibrate. But some of them were no longer upright, and it suddenly dawned that they were suffering from lack of oxygen.

Again Nyuk breathed relief as others fell. His strategy had worked, was working, and he walked about in triumph, again talking, his features regaining color.

But not for long. Novakkans still standing worked on doggedly driving their shaft deeper into the ground. When one keeled over another took his place. Their determination on a mission of vengeance was unrivaled, so far as men knew.

And then other Novakkans arrived with helmets and spacesuits.

Soon the fallen were again standing, in full spaceman's regalia, and the tempo of the work increased.

Nyuk's apprehension returned. He studied dials, moved controls, tried to hurry up the process that would enable them to go on. But it appeared to be geared to planetary motion.

And in those last minutes, when the Novakkans were but a few yards away, hacking through the laboratory wall, Nyuk came out of his jacket, unsheathed a long slender blade, half the weight of those of the Novakkans, and a raygun.

His action came as a surprise to Aleta. She had thought that he wouldnt fight. Now he was a man prepared to die in the heat of conflict. And in his features, above that jutting red beard, was a look that declared he would take some of his enemies with him.

She wondered how she'd been able to think of him as other than human. For only a human is so grimly fierce and premeditated in that hour when he knows he must fight to the death.

The wall crashed behind her. She heard thundering Novakkan voices. One stood out above the others. It was the roaring of Rahn Buskner. The last time she had seen him his back had been an expanse of gore and a blade was buried to the hilt in the muscles of his chest. No ordinary man would have lived to fight again. But Rahn Buskner, she knew, was not ordinary. Earth's exiles were, in some respects, supermen. Their enormous growth and strength were merely the outward expression of their vitality and courage.

As she came up from the floor and whirled to look, she was unprepared for the final shock. The Novakkans were inside the laboratory, true, but to them it was solid and nothing about it was transparent. They had come down through a shaft of their own making. And in relation to her they were little more than two feet tall.

His body showing fresh scars through plastic armor and spacesuit, his ugly features black with hate and recent fighting, Rahn Buskner stood scarcely an inch taller than his followers.

Astonished at the size of his opponents, he hesitated briefly, as Aleta watched. Whether he recognized her before she screamed was another question. But he must have recognized her voice, she reasoned. He turned away, hurled himself straight at Nyuk, his tiny blade whistling about his head.

Rays flashed. Another section of wall came down. Bodies burst, burned.

She heard a groan, a shriek from Nyuk, whirled in time to see him spit two Novakkans on his blade which was now three times the length and size of theirs.

His trousers had been slashed and he was bleeding about the legs. She saw tiny Novakkan blades reaching for him, their wielders leaping high.

It was not because of these things that he shrieked. He had called a warning to her. And before her eyes he began to grow less dense, to become almost transparent, almost invisible. It took a moment for her to realize that the same thing was happening to her.

"The time," he shouted. "The position!"

And as he spoke, a thrown blade passed through his body. No blood spurted. Nothing. It left him undamaged. They were moving into still another dimension. Or something equally as radical was taking place.

Points of light flashed on every hand. A great white expanse, as of snow, grew about them. Bitter cold came.

Still clamoring about the laboratory, and apparently growing in stature, were the Novakkans, now in confusion. It was apparent that they could still see their quarry, could see the points of light and the expanse of snow, but could not follow.

Aleta realized that her own size was diminishing which presented the illusion that the Novakkans were growing.

She saw Rahn Buskner, now his normal height of something more than seven feet staring at her and at the scene behind her. She could hear his voice which was no longer roaring..

"The Eg planet," he said. That was all. Then he vanished from sight.

"Another moment," Nyuk warned, as he took her hand. "I've salvaged my jacket. Put it about your shoulders."

She glanced down at the blood dripping from his legs.

"It shouldn't have happened," he explained. "Their metal should have passed through me without injury. But as they came down deeper into the field they acquired some of the properties of the field. We're lucky to be alive."

Aleta had no doubt about that. She had never been closer to death.

And then they were in darkness and the points of light were stars. In a moment she was numb with cold. Under her feet were ice and snow. She would freeze to death, she knew, within minutes if something weren't done.

Nyuk drew her along by the hand. "We're on the outer surface," he said. "My father could never be certain that the inner city wouldn't be captured." He led her down a dark passage, paused. "It's here somewhere," he went on. "Beams that have to be broken. Only minutes to find them."

He found one beam. It was a thin crimson streak, faintly visible.

"The others are invisible," he said in dismay. "I remember now. We'll never find them."

The mention of beams, some of them invisible, stirred something in Aleta's memory. It was vague, but she recalled electrical instruments attached to her nerve terminals and someone exclaiming, "The snow mesa!"

"There are three more beams?" she said.

"Yes," Nyuk almost shouted. "Do you know where they are?"

What had prompted her to say there

were three more beams was not clear. Shivering, she probed her memory in desperation, trying to recall something that seemed to be right there on the fringes.

Finally the words came. "Break the beam on your right and the three invisible beams on your left at the same time!"

Nyuk moved swiftly, spreading his arms wide. A door yawned open and let purple light into the passage. They stepped through the doorway into warmth and increasing light. They went on through another doorway and then she recognized the room in which she had been questioned by the Egs in their under mountain palace.

Memory made her legs tremble. The Novakkans knew about this place. She would never forget the fighting and orgies in the corridors. But it all seemed impossible. A few minutes ago she had been on a remote planet, still in this system, true, but remote. Or, she asked herself, could Nyuk have circled back and touched down on the dark side of this same planet? It all seemed unreal, impossible. But there could be no doubt that she was back where she had fought off Wilmo the Younger until the Novakkans interrupted his amours.

As they moved along from chamber to deserted chamber, now stripped of their riches, she felt that she would never be free of fear here. But there was one consolation. Her last glimpse of Ernest Vardon was on this planet. If he was still alive she would find him and again they would plot to escape.

"My father built this place." Nyuk told her. "He was a friend of the Egs and helped them move their wealth out."

She could understand how the elder Nyuk had grown rich trading with the Egs, carrying out Novakkan booty to other system, but how he had escaped the Novakkans themselves was another question. He had to be a man of many resources. And the galaxy was broad. No doubt she would learn many things from the redbearded man. She determined, at the first opportunity, to excercise her wiles and gain any nowledge that could be put to use in escaping to Earth.

CHAPTER TEN

NYUK led her to a blank wall where he broke invisible beams that set in motion hidden machinery.

"At the end of a full cycle," he said, "we will have a place of refuge. It opens by the rays of our two suns. In the meantime I will get food."

He was gone so long that Aleta feared he had lost his way in the endless corridors. His clothes were torn and dirty when he returned, and his face was bruised. He offered no explanation, but handed her a container of Vinth and several kinds of fruits and meats, and again departed.

She had thought that she would never be hungry again, but now she was famished. Sight of the food made her try a bite without waiting. She went on eating, glancing up from time to time with words of apology ready to be uttered the moment he returned. An hour passed, and she grew worried.

Fearfully, she went in search of him. The moment she reached the corridor she heard a hissing sound that reminded her of the opening of an airlock. Holding herself rigid, she waited, listened. The sound came again, but was distant, receding.

Heart hammering, she crept along in the direction from which the sound had come. The cross corridor was quiet, nothing moved as far as she could see in either direction.

And then she heard a faint gasp.

Moving forward again through purple dimness, she felt her foot strike something. The gasp came again. She leaped back, then kneeled, touched the body.

It wasn't Nyuk. It was a beardless Eg, lying in a pool of blood. Nearby was a blade crimson from point to hilt.

Quickly she felt for his pulse. It was rapid but very faint. He was dying. Blood oozed out of his side and from a gash in his throat. He groaned one more

time and lay quiet. Soon his pulse stopped.

There was no sign of Nyuk, but that he had killed this man she had little doubt. Long ago she had stopped being squeamish and now she reasoned coldly.

Nyuk had been followed back under the mountain. At some point he had learned about it. After leaving the food with her, he had gone back to waylay his followers.

The thought gave her a sense of helplessness. After what she'd seen and endured, she knew she could fight beside a man, at least against the unwarlike Egs. Had he taken her into his confidence the two of them might have made a successful stand. As it was, Nyuk was gone —dead or captured.

Alone, facing the necessity of depending solely upon herself, she picked up the blade, wiped it on the dead man's clothes, balanced it in her hand, to get the feel of its weight. It was lighter than a Novakkan knife, as slender as Nyuk's blade, well balanced, keen.

Without a flicker of an eyeash, she unbuckled the dead man's belt, drew it about her own slender waist until the sheath hung at her left hip. She rammed the blade home, rested her left hand on the hilt, and vowed that if the need arose somebody would die on that point with her own hand driving it through his body.

Though exhausted, she didn't rest. She recalled what she could of the corridors, as she had seen them when Rahn Buskner took her from Wilmo the Younger, and began the long search for yellow daylight or rosy twilight.

Hours later she stumbled across packages of food and fragments of clothing and splotches of blood. It took no deep reasoning to tell her that fighting here had been recent.

The pupils of her eyes had expanded and she was no longer bothered by the dimness. She followed a well-worn course and emerged into mid-twilight directly beneath the snowclad peak.

It was the Eg world, all right, and in a little while she had her bearings. She had no trouble finding the quarters across from the bazaar. Moving noiselessly, she entered, found the apartment she had occupied, paused.

The question now was whether it was occupied by another. It was a chance she had to take. Unsheathing the blade, she pushed open the door.

Faint sounds reached her ears, but she couldn't tell whether they were coming from a sleeping person or from the building as a result of the changing temperature.

Cautiously she went on in and found the photon gun she had got from the ancient of the House of Admo in the niche behind the bed of hides, exactly as she had left it. With blade in one hand and gun in the other, she stretched out on the bed to relax until yellow daylight.

Twice she leaped up ready to defend herself, and twice sheepishly lay back down.

Daylight came. She crept out before others in the building were awake and waited in the pavilion.

The stall of the House of Admo opened, but not by the hand of the bearded ancient. An aged Eg woman opened the door, stepped back out of sight.

Aleta crossed the byway, entered. The woman came forward, studied her briefly, drew back.

"You're the girl who brought trouble," she said emotionally. "Go away. Don't ever come here again."

"I'm sorry," Aleta said. "If the execution was carried out, I know your loss has been great. I would like to do something to help."

"You can help by leaving this planet and never coming back."

"I intended to at the first opportunity. But in the meantime I need help. If your man were alive he would give it. I must have clothes, men's clothes, and my hair cut short."

The woman repeated, "Go away."

Aleta fingered the photon gun, the blade. She had resolved to be ruthless, to

let nothing stop her. But this aged and griefstricken woman was too pitifully helpless. She couldn't bring herself to do what she had planned.

With tears dimming her own eyes, she returned to the byway. A short distance farther on she saw a Golgon about her size. Instantly the resolve renewed itself.

Closing up the distance, she glanced about hastily for others. The byway was deserted. She rammed the photon gun against the Golgon's back and shoved him between two building.

"Now," she ordered, "out of those clothes."

He seemed amused. Again she threatened him with the gun, whipped out the blade and opened a tiny wound on his arm. This he understood, and no longer hesitated.

As he came out of the clothes she slipped out of her dress and got into them. She examined his turban, wound it about her head.

"Now," she said, "do I pass?"

"Yes," he said, "but I don't. At least leave me money enough to buy clothes."

She found a package of metal tied to his belt, flung it to him.

"Thanks," he said. "I won't even report the holdup."

An hour later she was at the Vinth garden. The dancing girls were not there, but the small fat Eg was. She concluded that he had bought immunity from the Novakkans by betraying her. She asked him to join her at a table.

"I want information about a man named Nyuk," she said in a bass voice.

The Eg eyed her suspiciously. She couldn't tell whether he penetrated her disguise.

"Nyuk," he said, "is a wealthy man with many interests in this system. He has not been seen here recently."

This was much too cagy. He should have mentioned, she felt, Nyuk's escape with the Novakkan slave-girl. She went on:

"Tell me of the Earthmen who come here."

He shrugged. "Not many. Earthmen and Novakkans don't mix."

"Then tell me of the Novakkans."

He was hesitant, but said, "Two ships were down a season ago. There was the usual amount of fighting. Then they went out on a mission. Earth ships appeared soon thereafter, but didn't touch down They were interested only in the Novakkans."

"Did many die in the fighting?"

"Our people, yes. Novakkans fight; others suffer. There were a number of executions."

"A crippled man, a man with one leg, was he executed?"

The Eg shrugged. "It is not wise to be too interested in such things. Novakkans come and go. Earth warships stand off and watch. Our position is delicate. You understand? And now perhaps you'll tell me the name of your ship and why you want so much information?"

"I'm an Earthman, as you can see."

The Eg smiled, "Colonist?"

"Naturally. And I'm interested in both Novakkans and Earthmen."

The smile vanished. "It may be wise to decide which side you're on. Earth is settling its differences with its colonies and soon their ships may be out in force against the Novakkans. This planet has no worthwhile bases, except for minor repairs, but it may become a ball of rubble when Earthmen and Novakkans clash in full-scale war."

Aleta remained silent until the Eg started to rise, then said, "I'm asking again about Nyuk."

The Eg gestured toward the dressing rooms. "The girls hear all the rumors. For a reasonable sum they may give you information. Come back about twilight."

Aleta walked out on the plain and casually looked over the ships. They were all traders, some of them obviously armed, and their crews were on hand. She had wondered why the city was so quiet. Now she understood. Trouble was brewing. Crewmen were not given liberty. Every ship was ready to be launched on

a moment's notice.

This planet, she understood, was the focus of something big which had already begun to develop.

Keeping out of sight as much as possible, and fighting hunger, she idled about until twilight, then returned to the Vinth garden. Without thinking she went on back to the dressing rooms. The girls squealed in simulated fright, but quieted when she removed the turban. In another hour she had learned what she came for.

Nyuk had been attacked and captured by Golgons who failed to recognize him. He arranged for ransom through a combine of Egs and was probably free. The girls had learned all this from Golgons who indulged too much. Everyone in the city would know of it before yellow daylight. They would also know that the Golgons and the Egs would suffer Novakkan vengeance for releasing Nyuk. Word had come from an outer planet that the Novakkans wanted him more than they wanted treasure.

There were also rumors that he had dealt the Novakkans a terrific blow on his own planet. And it was known that Earth warships were gathering. What would happen was uncertain, but everyone wished he was off this planet.

Aleta returned through the city and found the entrance to the palace under the mountain. The Novakkans had left it open and she could find no way to close it. Nor did she care. On this day she had resorted to force. Now she felt that she could defend herself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DEEP inside the corridor she paused where she had seen the fragments of clothing and packages of food. The food was gone. Had she been inclined to swear she would have done so now. She would have cursed herself for not stealing food before returning.

Too exhausted for more effort now, she went on to the chamber where she had last seen Nyuk. He was there, and about him were the half-empty packages of food. He was still dirty and bruised and looked exhausted. He eyed her masculine clothes, the blade and the raygun, nodded approvingly.

"Ten minutes left," he said. "Eat."

She ate ravenously, then followed him to the blank wall where he had broken the invisible beams. Nothing had changed. He seemed puzzled.

"My calculations," he said, "may be off a few seconds, even a minute. Wait."

Soon a panel slid back revealing another blank wall. After a few seconds it, too, opened on still another blank wall. The final panel opened into a rose-lighted chamber, richly furnished but with musty odors.

Nyuk found the controls and set in motion machinery that would clean and renew the air.

"Our refuge," he said. "Here we will work."

Other chambers reminded her of the laboratory underground on the planet attacked by the Novakkans. A treasure-trove of knowledge.

"It hasn't been opened since my father's day," Nyuk explained. "I've memorized the things he told me."

Aleta understood. As a child, Nyuk had heard of this place, also the dangers involved. The knowledge itself had given him a sense of power and arrogance, but he'd been hesitant about risking the dangers. In the course of life he'd paraded his wealth, tempted the Novakkans, done things to provoke them, all for the purpose, hidden in his subconscious, of driving himself to undertake this final adventure. She understood him, she was certain, better than he understood himself.

And the understanding gave her a feeling of kinship.

"Secrets of the past," he explained, "and the future. Stored here. Man never develops his full potential. Your own history is an example. The Egyptians had gone far in science, then the knowledge was lost. In every age man has, at

his fingertips, the opportunity to learn the ultimate Cause and Effect. He always stops short of the answer. Why? Something stops him, something bigger, some ultimate law that is part of conscious intelligence itself. It doesn't want to be toyed with. But we need not stop. My father made it clear that the knowledge that it exists is the first step to finding the ultimate Cause and Effect."

Aleta didn't like the talk. It sounded wild, a trifle desperate. as coming from a feverish imagination. She studied Nyuk for signs of breaking. He was tense, high strung, his features flushed, his pulse too high. The situation was fraught with danger. The entrance to the palace was open, the Golgons knew where to find him, and yet he stood here talking of fantasies.

"We must guard the entrance," she warned.

He shook his head. "We're safe here. Except for food we have everything we need."

She didn't like it. Something about him had grown younger, more reckless. This, when they needed mature thought. This, when the planet, caught between Earthmen and Novakkans, might become a ball of rubble. This, when they were both objects of Novakkan vengeance, when they couldn't hope to find a friend nearer than the SYZ System.

Total exhaustion came. She finally slept on a couch in a chamber that was almost totally dark. She dreamed she was smothering and woke to find herself in Nyuk's arms. She struggled, fought, kicked, bit, scratched, but his strength was too much for her. He had finally demanded what he considered rightly to be his.

She could struggle no longer. She lost herself in surrender and knew then that she would never again be afraid of him.

He was gone when she awoke and returned hours later with a huge bundle of food. He led her to the three connecting panels and showed her how to lock them from the inside.

"They aren't likely to be discovered," he said. "But if they are, when locked inside they will withstand an army. Keep them locked when I'm away. We'll arrange a signal."

She found herself taking an interest in the things that interested him, trying to give meaning to his wild thoughts, but always she dreamed of Earth, of Dave and Mae, of Norwich Wyatt who would someday understand that she couldn't have done otherwise. She had never fully accepted the thought that he had forgotten her, give her up as dead and married another. Deep in her heart, she knew, he would always be first.

But here was a man who needed her, who made demands and took what he demanded, who had defied the Novakkans and dealt them a terrific blow, who had taken her from under their eyes, who had brought her by teleportation or some miraculous means back to the planet from which he had stolen her, a man who cared little for life, but who sought ultimate answers and, at times, convinced her he would find them.

Always she remembered her vow in the lifeship, that she would devote her strength to eradicating the madness in the universe that kept men perpetually at war, and in her allegiance with Nyuk she felt that she had taken the first steps. No other man's knowledge and courage would likely be so valuable in the same cause.

Weeks passed. They were not precisely happy weeks. At tmes she was lonely, discontent, longing for Earth, or even the yellow daylight of the Eg planet, and most of all, people.

Being wife to Nyuk was trying. He never confided where he was going or when he would return. Hours of anxiety. And when he was working in the laboratory he never told her his exact objective, never explained the steps toward it, but glowed like a youngster when something was accomplished, when a minor objective was achieved. At times he treated her as a servant; at other times he was

feverishly attentive.

Not by any means had her surrender cost her individuality. When loneliness became overwhelming she dressed in masculine clothes and went about the city. Twice she had narrow escapes from Golgons. They taught her caution and gave her confidence in her ability to take care of herself.

She was in the city when the Novakkan ships came down. They numbered nineteen. Rumors flew. When that many ships were together the Novakkans were on a mission of vengeance. The Egs began to desert the city. Those that could took passage to other planets. Others scattered across the habitable belt.

Back with Nyuk, she begged him to take her away. He scoffed at the idea. It was then that she thought she began to love him a little. Of all intelligent life in the galaxy, aside from Earthlings, he alone would defy Novakkans. And it occurred to her that if ever they were defeated he would be the one to do it.

But that was impossible. He had no following, nothing but his wily intellect, his sources of knowledge, his detachment from killing. Her fears grew, and she stayed away from the city.

Nyuk died the day after she had decided to tell him that they were to have a child. She had waited thirty-six hours. He'd never been gone that long before. She determined to go in search of him, and then found his body outside the three panels.

It was horrible. She would never forget. His features were peaceful, but he had been dismembered.

It took time for her to recover from the shock sufficiently to gather up the remains and leave them on the snow mesa.

Then she found the message. His dismembered body had been lying on it. It read: "Ernest Vardon needs you. Come to the Vinth garden."

That it was a trap she was almost certain. But there was still a possibility that Vardon was alive and did need her.

It took her two days to decide. At the end of that time she reached the conclusion that anything was better than remaining here alone.

She altered Nyuk's clothing to fit her, dressed rakishly, armed herself with two photon guns and Nyuk's blade. She had plenty of metal left by Nyuk, and filled a heavy purse and tied it to her belt.

In the city she scouted the ships on the plain. With rare exceptions, they were Novakkan—scarred, grim and forbidding. They had coursed the galaxy from end to end; they had seen more fighting than even Earth warships. The tales their wardrooms and compartments and corridors could tell would make the hair stand on end. The thought made her shiver as she returned along the byways.

The city was dismally quiet. This, with Novakkans on the planet. This, with nineteen raiders down. She saw three Egs and one Golgon. No one else except Novakkans. The neutrals had vanished.

She found Ernest Vardon in an upper room at the Vinth garden. His broken leg had mended; his artificial leg was attached. He looked strong and healthy, as he had when he stood between her and the mutineers on the lifeship, but his eyes were dull and his expression was that of a trance.

He didn't recognize her. The dancing girls did. They told her he had been left there by Novakkans, that they had been told she would come for him. It didn't make sense. Not until she reasoned it out coldly. The Novakkans knew she was hiding somwhere; they expected her to take Vardon to that place.

It would be the end. They had Vardon under control and some gadget attached that would enable them to track his movements.

"But," one of the Golgon girls said, "the Novakkans can find you anyway. They know you're in the city."

It still wasn't clear.

What was clear was the report of a fleet of Earth warships. They were standing outside the orbits of the outer planets.

The report was confirmed. Still the Novakkans made no move to take their ships aloft. It looked as if they would be caught sitting.

But again cold reasoning argued. Nineteen Novakkan raiders could be bait. Hundreds, thousands had circled the planet defended by Nyuk. They might now be standing behind the dead star waiting for the Earth fleet.

Aleta made her decision. "Keep Ernest Vardon and care for him," she told the Golgon girls, giving them a handful of metal.

Back in the underground palace, she searched the laboratory for a long range communicator. Nyuk was not the type of man who would neglect communication. He had been the only one who could communicate with Earth for her.

She found it. And it worked on a principle that she couldn't comprehend. It had no visual, no way to confirm the response on the other end. She might have been talking to Novakkans. But she had to take that chance. She told the Earth Council that Novakkan ships were believed to be grouped in the Eg System.

Then she inquired about Mae and Dave and Norwich Wyatt, but learned nothing. The Council didn't concern itself with minor individuals, nor did it entirely believe her report.

"You'll believe when the Novakkans tear your advance fleet apart," she warned. "Don't send them into the system without support."

"We're checking your identity and reliability," the man told her.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Two days later Aleta found diagrams and charts which gave her a clue to the secrets of the two laboratories. The mathematical symbols were difficult, but she found most of the answers in books and on the spools. The import was beyond comprehension, but one thing was clear: she held more power in the palm of her hand than any other lone individual in the galaxy.

Through an intricate teleportation system she could move in a few moments to the next inward planet and on to the one close against the dead star. By drawing magnetic energy from the star itself, she could set up a field of attenuation which would enable her, in effect, to pass through solid matter.

That was just the beginning. So much scientific lore was included in the books and formulas that the accomplishments themselves would amount to miracles.

Here. she realized, was something very close to the ultimate answer. With a group of dedicated scientists to carry out her orders, she could use her power to stop the ravage of war and bring peace to the galaxy.

The question was where to get the scientists. And how to test their loyalty to the cause of peace. The task would require a lifetime of effort.

And there was a contradiction. She would bring about peace by the use of force. If she couldn't trust others, could she trust herself? How would she feel when she had it in her power to issue orders?

The questions disturbed her. The thought of having unlimited power made her uneasy. The stirring inside her body was of far greater interest. She tried to calculate the exact time and what preparations would have to be made. And then came again the longing for Earth and the sight of Mae and Dave.

To check her knowledge, she set up a field and returned to the planet from which Nyuk had brought her. Part of the laboratory there was in ruin. But the actual equipment remained intact.

Memory of days in the forest palace reminded her of Nyuk's cruiser. There was a possibility it still remained. Nyuk had left a lethal field about the palace, gradually decreasing the oxygen content of the atmosphere. That meant

that the Novakkans would not remain long. In their awkward spacesuits they might not have found the cruiser.

Climbing the slanting shaft made by the Novakkans, she took careful note of her breathing. At the first sign of faintness she meant to hurry back to where the machinery kept the air fresh and clean.

The surface was blackened rubble. But the air was pure. She searched among the ruins, found mounds of bones, metal, jewelry and innumerable things imeprvious to the destruction.

From the laboratory she brought elaborate lamps and set them up at spaced intervals, then made a methodical search.

One heap of rubble towered nearly a hundred feet. She was doubtful about what was under it until she'd carefully recalled every familiar passage in the palace as it had existed before the destruction. Then she was certain that the crusier was there. Whether it had been damaged was another question.

She could do nothing more without rays to burn the rubble from about it.

Carefully she made her plans. She would return to the Eg planet, get Ernest Vardon and the two of them would clear away the rubble, dig out the cruiser, make whatever repairs were necessary and return to Earth.

It was where he wanted to go and where she wanted to go.

She would leave the laboratories sealed and have her child on Earth.

Someday she would return and take control of the power that could reach out from here. Her own child would never have to experience the hardship of war, as she had done. Of that she would make certain.

Back in the laboratory she studied the miniature systems and cosmographs. And on one of the Eg System she saw something moving that shouldn't be moving.

It took a while for her to understand that both the systems and the cosmographs duplicated in miniature precisely what happened in reality.

Two fleets were moving, one into the Eg System, one out from the Eg System. It was no trick to deduce that they were Earth warships and Novakkan raiders.

Her earlier deductions had been in error. The Novakkans had not been behind the dead star. They were far out near the Earth warships with a single planet between them. They were moving at right angle to the plane of the ecliptic. But the Earth ships were coming straight in toward the Eg planet where nineteen raiders still rested. They were followed by a huge supporting fleet.

It was little wonder that the Novakkans, far out, were turning away. The Earth fleet and its support might number tens of thousands.

The part that worried Aleta was that, according to the cosmograph, the raiders were on a trajectory that would cut the spaceway between Sol and the SYZ Systems. And with so many warships away from the home base, both Earth and its colonies would be comparatively unprotected.

She set the controls to take her back to the outer planet, then remembered. She couldn't hurry planetary motion. She had to await the pleasure of Cosmic Law.

But the time wasn't wasted. She dug through ancient books, listened to innumerable recordings, found supplies of clothing and food concentrates that had been stored for ages, and ray tubes that worked on principles aside from the photonic.

Some of the things she learned contradicted current knowledge. Whether the ideas were merely ancient quackery was something she couldn't test. For example, one book written in archiac English gave numbers of formulas purporting to show that a single cosmic law governed everything in the universe.

Other books gave theories of how planets and systems were created. The formulas were much too difficult, but she gathered that the prevailing theory was that all of space was filled with energy and that planets grew out of that energy, increasing in size until they attained a critical mass and began fission. Where hydrogen was present they began fusion instantly and became stars, eventually to nova or die and repeat the cycle.

Time fled. And then she was shocked alert by bitter cold. She was on the snow mesa.

Wasting no time, she hurried along the passage, broke the beam on the right and the three invisible beams on the left.

As she stepped through the doorway into warmth she heard something like thunder. The floor beneath her feet shuddered.

Something like compressed air roared through the chambers.

No storm, as far as she knew, had ever visited this part of the planet. Nothing but electrical disturbances.

Then she remembered. Her last sight of the cosmograph showed the Earth fleet moving in in attack formation. It seemed impossible that it could, in these short hours, be striking the Eg planet. It seemed outrageous that it would attack the neutral planet under any circumstances.

True, there had been nineteen Novakkan ships on the plain. But the Egs were powerless to keep them away.

The shuddering and roaring went on. Great gusts of air almost tore her clothes off. She could hardly keep on her feet.

And then she heard other sounds, even more ominous, sounds of clashing steel, men in mortal combat. They seemed to come from many directions, and they meant that men were in the corridors fighting hand-to-hand.

In desperation she hurried to the blank wall, broke the beams, then remembered that a full cycle must pass before the panels would open. She had set the controls that way before returning to the inward planet.

The corridors rang with the clashing of steel. At times she saw flashes, which meant rays were in use. The danger was great. Rays could bring down a wall, crush defenders and attackers alike, seal them as in a tomb.

But who could be attacking and who defending?

The question startled her. What was left of the populace might have taken refuge in the corridors. But surely Earthmen would not attack the populace. Who, then?

She had no refuge, no place that was safe. And it was certain that she couldn't get out to Ernest Vardon. So long as there was fighting in the corridors she could do nothing.

She was hopelessly trapped by a lock that required rays from both suns to open it, and a battle to the death moving toward her along the corridors.

One hand dropped to the haft of the blade Nyuk had worn; the other caressed the photon gun.

Without waiting for the battle to come to her, she moved cautiously toward the nearest clamoring. Nearly half an hour elapsed before she saw a live person. He was so huge he was unmistakably Novakkan even in the dim light. She aimed the gun, held it steady, but didn't fire.

He staggered against the wall, gradually slumped. He tried to get up but couldn't. She kneeled beside him, lifted his head.

"Water," he mumbled. Then: "Great fight. On along the passage. We're killing three to one. Hurry or you'll miss it."

Even with his last breath he could still say fighting was great. The thought was alien to Aleta. She wondered if it was something born in men that only evolution could change.

He was dead when she left and again

went toward the sound. She saw two more Novakkans, one flat on his face, the other on his knees trying to drag the other along the floor. They were both mortally wounded.

Instead of asking for help the one on his knees pointed toward the clamoring and said. "That way. Hurry!"

In their dazed condition, she realized, they took her for a friend.

She came to a slight decline lighted by distant flashes. She saw small groups of Novakkans pressing against the walls, lying on the floor, in various positions, all facing the flashes in the distance. Nearer the flashes were still other groups, and at one point was a jumble of confusion, men struggling at close quarters.

She could make little out of it. The confusion was too great. She could get no idea who the Novakkans were fighting.

And then behind her, at a cross passage, she heard a sudden roaring. As she turned she saw flashes, then Novakkans backing slowly toward her.

And then, for the first time, she heard the shouting and yelling of Earthmen. Their voices were unmistakable. It sent a tremor of both fear and nostalgia through her. They were driving the Novakkans before them—at what cost! As she watched she saw the Novakkans make a counterthrust and isolate a score of Earthmen and then cut them to pieces.

It was madness incarnate.

The Earthmen rallied and drove on. The Novakkans continued falling back toward her.

And from the other direction likewise.

It was then that she realized that what she'd first seen, in that confused tangle, had been identical with the strategy of the second. The Novakkans gave ground, then thrust and isolated a few Earthmen, cut them down and again gave ground.

That they were outnumbered was obvious. But, fighters all, they were taking a terrific toll.

The end, of course, she realized, would be about where she stood. The Novakkans would finally be grouped, with Earthmen on both sides.

Then the third stage of confusion began.

Both groups were almost on her. Mortally wounded Novakkans staggered back, fell at her feet. And even Earthmen, cut off from their forces, became confused and moved in the wrong direction.

She kneeled beside one Earth youth until he died.

Aside from Ernest Vardon and the derelicts on the Eg planet, it was the first time she'd seen an Earthmen since she was taken, so long ago, from the lifeship by Novakkans.

So much had happened since then. In a sort of daze she wondered how it would have been if she had married one of these clean-limbed youths and remained on Earth. The thought hurt. She discovered that she was crying.

And all about her was roaring confusion, the clashing of steel. the flashing of rays, the howls and shrieks of men killing and dying.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

But the big confusion came from the direction along which she had come. The shrieking be came high-pitched, almost a hopeless wail. Something terrible had happened there. The Novakkans were no longer giving ground. Nor were the Earthmen retreating.

In a moment Aleta knew why. In falling back into the cross corridor the Novakkans had led the Earthmen into a trap. A second force of Novakkans had moved along the dim passages and struck them from the rear.

It was as if all the demons of hell were howling.

The battering of steel, the shrieks, the screaming, the swearing, the

stench of blood and sweat and excrement, the flashing of rays, the gasping for a final breath, the groaning and straining to drive a point through bone and flesh, to split a head. to break a limb, to deal death before it was dealt, all added up to a roaring of confusion and a nightmare of horror.

Out of that melee of madness men staggered, Novakkan and Earthmen alike, bones broken, blood gushing out, eyes gone, bellies laid open to the spine, flesh cooked through and through, limbs gone or hanging limp; staggered, fell and crawled. Novakkan and Earthmen, side by side, staring vacantly at one another, gasping for breath, choking on blood, no longer hating—just dying.

Novakkan and Earthmen, they piled up in mounds.

But from the other direction the Novakkans continued falling back.

How long!

Aleta was spared the measurement of time. It may have lasted minutes or hours. It seemed forever until she ceased to think. The horror of it compelled her to make her mind blank, and time went on.

And then it was over and she was suddenly snatched to her feet by a Novakkan and a blade stopped just short of decapitating her.

The Novakkan growled something, then spoke in a language she understood. "The clothes fit the description." He turned to another Novakkan. "This may be the one Rahn Buskner wants.

She was led, half-dragged over the mounds of dead and dying, to the cross passage, along it, on along other passages, and finally pushed into a chamber where a score of Novakkans were sprawled on the floor, nursing their wounds, eating and drinking.

"For Rahn Buskner," the Novakkan said and departed.

The others glanced at her and one said, "You Earthmen put up a good fight, but you never know what it's all about. We lured you to this planet and while you're battering it our raiders are looting the ships carrying the reparation settlements between the SYZ System and Sol. They may even have time to plunder a few planets before your fleet gets back."

Aleta had suspected as much, but the actual news brought a shock. "Then you Novakkans must have spread the rumor that you had ships behind the dead star?"

The Novakkans roared with laughter. "We have one of the finest little tricks on our side in the galaxy. Earthgirl named Aleta. She herself got word to the Council."

Aleta slumped. No blow to herself, physical or mental, could have been more crushing. Unwittingly she had betrayed Earth. She wanted now to die.

"If we don't do it one way we do it another," the Novakkan went on. "We got word to them in a dozen ways, from the SYZ System, from the outer Eg planets, from the planets in Sol. But they intended to batter the Eg planets anyway. That's what brought their war with the colonies to an end. So long as they were fighting they couldn't spare a fleet. Now they'll unite. And our raids are nothing compared to the waste of war. In the end they will win, but you won't be alive. Rahn Buskner will have you strung up by the heels and dismembered slowly."

The threat left Aleta unmoved. She no longer cared what happened to her. Sometime, somewhere the use of force would be stopped and men would settle things by way of reason. If she lived—

Rahn Buskner came in. New scars showed on his face. His clothes were cut and burned to tatters.

He glanced at her, then called the others about him.

"We can't last another cycle," he said. "They number too many. They're closing up the passages. Our ships have already been put out of commission. But a few of us may live. At the

beginning of the next twilight we'll try to break out and capture one of their ships. Here's the plan—"

He was interrupted by a man who staggered in supporting two wounded.

"They offer a truce," the new arrival said. "They want to exchange prisoners and remove their dead. It will give us time which we need."

The others nodded. Rahn Buskner said, "Try to get a coordinated truce in all passages at once. Watch for treachery. We haven't any prisoners and when they realize it they'll feel free to attack again."

Somebody gestured toward Aleta. Rahn Buskner moved to her side and tore off the turban. "I've lost men today," he said, "because they were ordered not to kill anyone of your description. Some were hesitant and they died as a result."

"Is that the girl Aleta?" another asked. "A message from the Earthmen asked about her. A commander named Norwich Wyatt—"

Aleta's heart stopped beating. She ceased to breathe. A moment passed and then she realized that Rahn Buskner was supporting her.

"A one-legged Earthman is also interested," the man went on. "An enormous ransom has been offered to induce us not to harm her. The one-legged man will negotiate and bring Wyatt to identify her."

Rahn Buskner's scowl was black. "The girl is mine. I bought her and I won her in a fight. If the Earthmen take her I will follow to the end of the galaxy and retake her. Not even Novakkans may take her from me while I can use a ray or wield a blade."

The messenger turned to depart.

"Wait!" Aleta cried. She looked at Rahn Buskner. "If I promise to return, will you send me to the Earthmen and allow me to arrange a truce?"

Rahn Buskner stirred uneasily Though he'd tricked her and used her, and given her cause to hate him, she couldn't recall that he'd ever refused her a request. He was always gruff, but he'd never actually spoken harshly to her or raised a hand in harm. She'd seen him kill a man for plucking at her sleeve. She'd seen another die at his hands for his unwelcome advances. She'd seen the black looks on his features that spelled death whenever she was mistreated. But he was a man of contradictions. He'd allowed Ernest Vardon to live simply because she asked it. Now she waited for his answer.

"Go to the Earthman Wyatt," he said. "If you do not come back I will come for you."

The meeting was arranged in a broad neutral passage where the forces of each side had been drawn back. She had neither time nor opportunity to make herself presentable.

As she approached, in her masculine garments, her legs trembled.

Wyatt was tall and straight and almost startlingly handsome. He wore numerous ribbons and decorations. He was spic and span and had no scars showing. It was as if he were meeting her in a drawing-room.

She didn't look much like the girl he had held in his arms on the day she boarded the refugee ship with her heart singing. She was heavier, stronger, and the burden she carried in her body was beginning to be noticeable. Her hands were rough, her blonde hair uncombed, her features untouched with make-up. The blade at her side was as familiar as her garments. The photon gun fitted snugly into her hand and no longer wavered when she aimed it. She had passed among fighting men as a man. She wondered how Norwich Wyatt would see her now.

And then, suddenly, it didn't matter. He was not as broad as she remembered him, or as tall. He was easily six-feet, but so long had she seen Novakkans that ordinary men looked small. And somehow Wyatt and Ernest Vardon had become confused in her mind.

They had both needed her. Standing side by side, they still looked as if they needed her.

"I'm sorry, Aleta," Wyatt said. "No survivors were reported from the refugee ship and I thought you were dead. I tried marriage but it didn't work out. When word came through the Council that you were out here I put in a request to come. Now I've pledged all my property and Dave's and Mae's and, yes, yours as a ransom. We'll go back and begin over."

She shook her head. "You can't buy me back, Norwich." She hesitated. "The only way is to take me by force. Can you do it?"

His shoulders stiffened. It was apparent that he understood what she meant. "We'll rid this planet of Novakkans," he said. "Then you'll be free."

"Free, Norwich?"

His features grew darker. She had no doubt that he understood the size of the task ahead of him. His forehead creased into lines of thought, "Aleta," he said almost pleadingly, "well step between you and the Novakkans. You owe them nothing. Run to our lines. We'll get you safely back to Earth."

There was no hesitation about her reply. "If I'm not back with the Novakkans at the appointed time," she said, "at least one man will come for me. if he has to wade through the blood of your entire force.

"Go back to Earth, Norwich. Hurry! The Novakkans are even now raiding the ships in the spaceways between SYZ and Sol. They'll plunder the planets if the fleet doesn't return soon. Go, Norwich. Don't think again of the girl who once loved you."

She walked away quickly and realized that her face was wet with tears. She was alone. She had burned her bridge. She might never return to Earth, but what she had done was the least amends she could make for her unwitting betrayal of her native planet. And they could soon confirm her information by breaking communication silence.

She told Rahn Buskner, "I think they'll go away. If not, and if *we* can hold out until the end of the cycle, we can reach the inner planet."

"We?" he repeated. Then his great arm came about her. It was the first time she had ever known him to show tenderness and affection.

Six weeks later he said, "They've hammered at the planet of exile so much that we've abandoned it and scattered bases throughout the galaxy. I know one far off the spaceways, but still close enough to provide good looting. We'll go there, and if you like it I'll bring artisans and build a castle."

She moved her heavy body sluggishly. "Will we reach there in time?"

"In the cruiser, easy. And it's inhabited by a golden-hued race, lighter than I am, darker than you, a lot like the Golgons but more advanced. They have fine doctors, tutors and elementary scientists. They welcome the wealth we bring in. A fitting place to rear children."

* * *

After Aline was born he held her in the palm of his huge hand and stared at the auburn fuzz on her head. "She doesn't look like me," he said wryly, "but I'm willing to bet the next one will."

Aleta had made no effort to deceive him about the child and he accepted it with the wholehearted hunger of a lusty man who, having seen everything else in the galaxy, was deeply moved by the miracle of birth.

The second one was born while he was away. It was a boy and nearly seven weeks old when he returned loaded with spoils. Aleta had waited for him to name it.

He used both hands to lift it, then looked at the redhaired tot who had learned to walk while he was gone.

They were both enormously healthy and lively.

"True Novakkans," he said. "Someday we'll give them a whole planet from which to plunder the galaxy. Call him Moxol. In Novakkan it means relentless avenger."

Aleta smiled, but reserved her reply. She was thinking of the two laboratories in the Eg System and the education she meant to give the children.

END OF BOOK ONE

Author's note—

SYZ—S: Survival; all the factors in the system contributing to survival; Y, yield; all the potential energy in the system capable of conversion; Z, non-survival; all the negative factors in the system.

Eg—One or the beginning; this race may have come from Egypt.

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★ ★ ★

THE SUNDERING COSMOS

By Hal Annas

February 1956 OTHER WORLDS Don't Miss It!

WHEN I GROW UP

Earth had learned a bitter lesson. All her past glories, as well as her shames, had been seared from her face leaving only a radioactive wasteland. Then the moon-people came, and restored the Earth to man, with this provision—he who digs in the ground capriciously must be severely punished; he who digs treasonably must die!

By Richard Wilson

HE was twelve and he had a secret place in the woods behind the house.

It was a clearing that was surrounded by just enough obstacles to keep out stray grown-ups. There had been a storm years ago that sent young trees crashing down in a tangle of branches. Elsewhere at the borders of the secret place were bramble patches and a rocky cliff that fell away sharply.

But Ronnie was a boy, and to him these things were not a deterrent but a challenge. So he found the clearing one spring day, bright under the sun, with bushes and wildflowers still sparkling with the morning dew.

Ronnie spent the Saturday morning there, exploring his private kingdom. Once his mother called. Her voice from the house was so faint that it might have been only a freak of the wind—and so his conscience permitted him to ignore her.

He returned to the house for lunch. He hadn't been able to find the way he'd gone in and he'd scratched his face and arms as he forced his way through a tangle of branches and thorns to the familiar part of the woods.

"How did you scratch yourself like that?" his mother asked. "Where *have* you been? Didn't you hear me calling you?"

"No," said Ronnie, answering the question at random. "I was in the woods. I fell, that's all."

"Well, wash your hands and face and eat your lunch," she said. "And stay around the house this afternoon. Your uncle's coming over. He said something about taking you to the city."

"Aw, phooey," said Ronnie. "I don't want to go to the city."

"Well," his mother said, "that certainly is a nice way to talk. You don't see your uncle so often that you can't be polite about it when he does come. Goodness knows he does enough for you."

"Okay, okay," he said. "I'll go. I just sort of planned to go back down to the woods."

"Time enough for that another day."

They copted to the city in his uncle's three-seater. Uncle Dan, his mother's brother, had to go to the Buy-All and Ronnie tagged along dutifully through the ordering of tractor parts and ponic supplements. Uncle Dan was a farm manager and Ronnie thought his business was very dull. Ronnie wanted to be a Moon pilot, himself.

Finally Uncle Dan had placed his last order. He took Ronnie's hand and headed, grinning, toward Games & Toys. Ronnie wriggled his hand free—after all, he was *twelve*—and said innocently:

"Where we going. Uncle Dan?"

"Never you mind, boy. You'll see in good time."

"It was a ritual. Both new perfectly well that Ronnie's reward would be something his widowed mother couldn't afford to buy for him. Sometimes it was clothing, unfortunately, but more often it was something worth while. There'd be a skimmer, once—a junior copter with an altitude governor that kept it under twenty feet. And once Uncle Dan had got him an equipoid, a faithful copy by the Robotics Trust of the extinct horse.

A lot of things had become extinct since The War, in which the Earth people finally succeeded in wiping themselves out—except for the Moon colony.

Ronnie hadn't been born on the Moon. He regretted that. His mother and father had been, and his Uncle Dan. His grandfather hadn't, but Grandpa had been one of the first colonists. He'd told many a story, Grandpa had, of The War, and how it began. And how it ended, with Earth a dead world.

A missile had come over, from the East. A robot missile. It hadn't been planned as an attack. It was to have been a show of force, merely; another persauder in the propaganda war against the West. It was to have set out, well heralded, not to destroy but to warn, to swoop low over cities on its preappointed course and to return to its base in the East.

But a Western plane had shot it down, and Chicago had been destroyed in the explosion.

The cities vanished swiftly after that. Kiev, Juneau, Stalingrad, Paris, Moscow, London, Washington, Kharkov, San Francisco, Ottawa, Johannesburg, Odessa, Oslo, Tokyo, Peking.

And so it went. The Moon colonists watched the lights flare up and wink out, one by one, as the cities died, and then the places between the cities. At last only the colonists were left of all those who had lived on the third planet.

They'd waited ten years, after the last radio message had been heard, before they sent out a ship. They worked, in that decade, as they never had before. They'd just achieved self-sufficiency—a hairline between extinction and the continuation of humanity—and there was nothing they could do for Earth before they did for themselves.

Years tled by as they studied the problem. It was no longer a smoking world, the dead Earth, but a challenge. Though it was dead it was more alive than Mars or Venus. They had been to the second and fourth planets but neither offered the hope of a reborn Earth—if Earth could be reborn.

Earth's embers had cooled but the radioactivity had not. Earth was a hot world, a deadly world.

A farmer found the answer. Plow it.

They laughed, at first. But as other suggestions were made and rejected the farmer's answer stayed with them, became part of the language.

"I don't see any other way," they said. "We'll just have to plow."

Someone composed a ballad that swept the colony. *Plowing Time*. Everybody sang it. A group of scientists form-

ed a Springtime Society, advocated spring plowing. They were dead serious. Not with horses, which had not been brought to the Moon and were therefore extinct, or with tractors, but with the Moon ships. From above, far away from the contamination, with the force beams.

They tried it, finally, after experimenting with a stretch of Moonland.

It worked.

When all the radioactivity had been plowed under they sent out a suicide ship, manned by volunteers.

They lived.

More than that, they thrived. The soil was fertile as it had never been. The seedlings and transplanted vegetables from the ponic gardens of the Moon shot up to heights unprecedented. The yield of an acre of land was triple what it had been. The corn was high as a giraffe's eye, instead of an elephant's, and even the runt cobs were a foot long.

The old land, the hot land, the radioactivity, was far under. Far enough down to be harmless, close enough up to be useful.

The colonists came home.

"You might be interested in this" the Buy-All salesman said. "We call it a Buildit."

Ronnie turned it over in his hands. It was shaped like a long-barreled pistol. It had no trigger, but a notch-and-dial arrangement on the thumb-rest.

"What does it do?" Uncle Dan asked the salesman.

"Just about everything. It's a universal tool, you might say, though only for woodworking. It saws, planes, bevels, joins and so on. Hammers, too, if you want the antique nail-finish.

"Here, son, try it on this."

Ronnie took the plank of synthowood and sliced the end off it, zip, with the Buildit. He moved a notch over one place with his thumb and planed smooth the detached end. Another notch, and the end was firmly reattached to the plank. Another, and the Buildit studded a section of the plank with carvings of Ronnie's inspiration, easy as finger-painting.

"This is terrific, Uncle Dan," Ronnie said. "Boy!"

"Check it off," his uncle said. "We'll take it."

They'd had a late supper in the city and by the time Ronnie got home it was time to go to bed. He put the Buildit on the table next to the night-light so it would be the last thing he saw before he closed his eyes and the first thing when he opened them.

Sunday was Church. The survivors were devout and strict. There was no work and no play on Sunday. There were family devotions and Church and devotions again and rest and reading and watching religious programs on video.

The Buildit lay on the night table, untouched, all Sunday.

Monday was school, of course. Ronnie decided against pretending to be sick. He might have to keep on being sick after three o'clock and not get to use the Buildit till Tuesday. He went dutifully to school, raced home afterwards, wolfed down a snack, shoved the Buildit into his pocket and was off to his secret place.

He was both pleased and annoyed that it took him so long to find a way in. Annoyed because he was impatient to put his new possession to work; pleased because if he, who knew the hidden place, had trouble finding it, others would never discover it.

Inside the glade at last, with a new scratch or two, Ronnie sat down on a sunwarmed rock and pulled the Buildit out of his pocket. He held it this way and that, admiring it from different angles, deferring the delicious pleasure of putting it to work for the first time.

There was something he hadn't seen. Etched into the butt of the device were

the words: "Global law forbids use of this tool for digging."

Well, obviously. Everybody knew you weren't allowed to dig. It was the First Law. He could even recite it:

"Anyone who digs in the earth capriciously; or who, having obtained permission by reason of his trade or profession exceeds the permitted limits shall be subject to such punishment as the Council may decide, not to exceed life imprisonment; and anyone who digs treasonably shall be condemned to death."

He learned that in school. Everybody learned it. He ought to know it better than anybody. Hadn't his father died because of digging?

His father had been a mining engineer and his profession had exempted him from the law. But it hadn't exempted him from death. The mine had been a shallow one, as mines went, but even so there'd been geigers in it. His father had got a big dose of them and they couldn't help him. He died in the hospital a month later. That had been years ago. His mother had lived ever since on an RA pension.

So Ronnie knew all about radioactivity, and the digging taboo. Of course he wasn't going to dig with the Buildit. He was going to build a hut.

He had the frame up before suppertime. The Buildit sliced magically through the trunks of the young trees he'd selected and they came down with wonderful earthshaking crashes. He trimmed them, notched them and joined them. The hardest part was hoisting them into place as the walls grew higher. He added the trimmed-off branches to the wall of brush and thornbushes around his glade.

There were no doors or windows yet. He'd slice them out later, when and where he needed them.

As the sun started going down his mother called, ringing the old clapper bell that meant mealtime. He realized he'd become enormously hungry and hesitated only for a last look at his hut before shoving the Buildit in his pocket and working his way through the barrier.

He ran all the way. He didn't remember ever feeling so good, except maybe the first time he'd soloed in his skimmer.

The Buildit gave him a scare when he was slicing out the door. He'd carelessly got his left hand behind a section of the frame and his right thumb flicked on the slicer before he meant to.

In a heart-stopping panic he jerked his left hand away, expecting to see some fingers missing, at least. But they were all there. He sobbed in relief.

Ronnie decided he'd better learn the limits of the Buildit. He set it for drill and pointed it close to a rock. Nothing happened. But at the same setting it mowed down a bush. And beyond the bush the Buildit had churned up the soil.

Ronnie looked around guiltily. No one had seen, of course. And it wasn't really digging. It had been an accident. Quickly he stamped down the soil he'd disturbed.

To take his mind off the involuntary infraction, he propped up a row of discarded lengths of branch to test the range of the Buildit. He set the dial to slice, and sliced.

There were eight lengths of wood. The beam had sliced through six of them and part way through the seventh. It had a range of about a yard. So that was why, when he sliced out the doorway, the beam hadn't gone on and cut out part of the back wall.

By Saturday the hut was finished. It looked like a log cabin and he was pleased with it. He set the Buildit on carve and fancied up the cabin a bit with a secret design over the doorway.

He puttered around adding sills to the windows and making a rustic chair and table and tamping down the earth inside. But then there wasn't much more that could be done.

He'd taken a book on the Old West

out of the school library and lazed away the rest of the morning, sitting at his table just inside the cabin door.

He became bored with the hut and wished he'd built something else instead. A model Moon ship maybe. But he wasn't going to make it today. The heck with that. He'd worked hard enough for one week.

As the long Saturday wore on he lost interest in his book. He was just sitting there, munching on a sandwich and sipping a cup of soup from the lunch his mother had packed for him, when he heard the voice.

He didn't *hear* it, exactly. It was more as if he were thinking words that weren't his.

"Hello, up there," said the words. "Hello, up there."

Ronnie took another bite of sandwich and another sip of soup, thoughtfully. He concentrated. The words still came:

"Hello, up there."

"Hello," said Ronnie thinking the words, not saying them.

The other words stopped.

"Shucks," Ronnie thought. "I ruined it."

"No you didn't," the other words said, "I'm still here. A bit surprised somebody heard me, that's all."

"Where are you?" Ronnie thought the words. He would have felt foolish talking out loud to somebody he couldn't see.

"Underground. Not far."

"What are you doing there?"

"I've been waiting for you."

"Me? Why me?"

"Not you in particular, necessarily. But someone who'd hear me, finally. I've been down here about fifty years. Fifty or sixty, I estimate. You lose track after a while."

"You wouldn't kid me, would you?" Ronnie asked.

"Not for the world." There was a pause. "You're a man, aren't you? It's a bit hard to tell."

"Well," said Ronnie, "yes. I'm twelve —going on thirteen."

"Oh." The voice seemed disappointed. Then: "Maybe it's just as well. Are you strong?"

"Strong enough. Why?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Sure. Why? Who are you?"

"I'll tell you about it," the voice said. "Listen."

Ronnie listened, skeptically at first. No one was going to kid him. His skepticism ebbed as the words continued to sound inside his head. But he finished his sandwiches and his soup as he listened. Eating was pretty important, too. And the voice had said he had to be strong. The voice sounded like his father's, from what he remembered.

The name of the man underground was Allison Temple. Sure he was a man. He wasn't a ghost yet. And he'd got there by burying himself before The War. Not in a grave, or anything spooky like that, but scientifically, in a lead-lined steel container.

He'd been in the metalworking business before The War, subcontracting for General Electric. Made lead-lined containers for GE's hot stuff. He'd had a premonition when the first bombs fell that there'd be enough more of them to kill off the world, or at least make a pretty thorough shambles of it. So he'd adapted one of the containers for himself and others for a few other people who'd wanted them. Not many; maybe a dozen.

One of the other people had been in secret research and he'd developed something that might have the same effect on human beings as it had on laboratory animals. It was a kind of impregnated plasma that induced suspended animation.

Somebody else in the group had been playing around with extrasensory preception and telepathy. A vaudeville performer, he'd been, in self-defense. Organized science hadn't been interested.

So they pooled their talents and skills and worked like mad at their prepara-

tions in the early days of The War until the time came when they had to take a chance with what they'd got by then. They couldn't afford to wait any longer. They'd drawn lots to see who would be last and then, one by one, they dug deep pits and buried each other in the containers. The last one would have to depend on outsiders to bury him. Temple didn't know if he'd managed to persuade anyone to do it for him.

They'd chosen out-of-the-way spots, far from the prime targets—cities—and scattered themselves all over the country, to increase their chances of survival. Oh, yes, some of them were women. And each of them swore that if he survived and were dug up, somehow, he'd devote the rest of his life, if necessary, to freeing the others.

"Wow!" said Ronnie. "That's terrific!"

"It sure is. What amazes me," Temple said, "is that everything worked. I am in suspended animation, except for my mind, and I did survive the bombings, and I have developed telepathy. I hope the others were as lucky. You haven't heard of any of them being dug up, have you? Telepathy doesn't work over long distances."

"No, I haven't heard of anybody," Ronnie said. "What I want to know is, why didn't you go to the Moon?"

"Couldn't. That was a long time before you were born, of course, and I guess nobody ever told you, but it was total war in a big hurry and nobody could go to Canada and Mexico, even, let alone the Moon. Your folks were already up there, of course. I've read enough of your mind to know they came back and fixed up the world again. I'd like to know more about that, of course, but right now what interests me most is getting out of here."

"Natch," said Ronnie. "How are you going to do that?"

"That's where I need your help," Temple said. "You'll have to dig, I'm afraid. But once you reach the container it'll be easy. I'll tell you how to open it and revive my body."

Ronnie pushed breadcrumbs around on the table top. He didn't know what to say.

"What you do," Temple went on, intensely now, in a rush of thoughts, "is walk around and think to me. When your thoughts are strongest you'll be directly over me and I'll let you know. Then you dig right there. It'll take a little time and it'll be dull work. It'll be harder on me than on you, though, just waiting. But I've waited a half a century or more, so I guess I can be patient another day or so."

Ronnie was still avoiding the thought that must come out.

"What's the matter, son?" Temple asked. "We seem to be out of touch." There was a trace of panic now. "You haven't gone away, have you?"

"No," said Ronnie. "It's just that . . . "

And he explained to the buried man the taboo against digging. He recited the law, with its penalties for capricious digging.

"But this isn't capricious!"

Or treasonable, Ronnie told him. It *might* be treasonable. He didn't know.

It was a dilemma, Temple admitted. He appeared to be calm again, and thinking hard. Ronnie had an impression of thoughts, too fast for words, whirling past him.

"Look," the buried man said finally. "I can't make you do anything you don't want to. I can't control your mind; I can only communicate with it. So all I can do is put it to you man to man: I need you. Without you I can't get out. I'll be buried here for the rest of your life, and God knows how many other people's lifetimes. So all I can do is appeal to you. I need help; you can help me. Will you?"

"I don't know," Ronnie said. He was miserable.

"There's no hurry, Lord knows," Temple said. "Think about it. Go home and consider it. If you decide to do it, wonderful. I'll be in your debt forever. If you decide you can't—well, that's tough. Maybe you'd know of someone else who would—though I'd rather it were you. Think about it and come back tomorrow and let me know."

"I can't tomorrow. Tomorrow's Sunday."

"Oh. Special day, I suppose, for the survivors. Well, Monday, then. I'm good at waiting. But please come back. Please."

"I will," Ronnie promised. "I will, Mr. Temple."

Ronnie thought about it all day Sunday. He thought about it during family devotions. At Church, as he knelt, he prayed about it and listened hard for an answer. There was none. But in bed that night, as he lay looking out the window at the Moon—the Moon his parents had come from, with others, courageously, to reclaim the Earth—he knew he had the answer. He didn't know where it came from, but he had it. Mr. Temple *did* remind him of his father.

Monday morning he pushed his Buildit into his pants pocket as he dressed, covered the end of it with his handkerchief, gulped his breakfast and ran off as if toward school. Then he doubled back and went to his secret place.

He was panting as he stood in front of his hut and studied the ground underfoot.

"Hello, Mr. Temple," he said. "Let me know where you are so I can start digging."

They communicated telepathically as Ronnie dug.

Of course he wasn't radioactive, Temple said. In the first place he'd been buried deep enough to be safe. And in the second, he'd been there long enough to have cooled off even if he had been hot. When he said he, he meant the outside of the container. Obviously he was safe inside the lead lining.

Ronnie experimented with the Buildit till he found the best way to adapt it to digging. That seemed to be to set the dial to drill and churn up the soil, get it loose. Then switch over to hammer and knock the dirt out.

But it was slow work. At times he put the Buildit aside in disgust and scooped out the dirt by the handful.

Temple encouraged him from below, told him stories to pass the time, recalled games he had played when he was a boy, made up limericks, quoted poetry —but in time his thought grew less fertile, and still the hole was not deep.

At three oclock Ronnie had to go home and pretend he was arriving from school. And eat. By playing hooky he'd gone without lunch. Then he hurried back and dug again until his mother rang the bell for supper.

He skipped school again on Tuesday. He dug all day. He was absent on Wednesday, too, and then Thursday and Friday. And the hole was deep now.

Temple's thoughts seemed stronger, too, or was that imagination?

But the deeper the hole grew, the more and more difficult it was to get rid of the dirt. Ronnie's arms and back had ached for days and now, with the hole neck-deep, it was torture to send the dirt high enough so it cleared the mound of fresh earth around the rim and didn't scatter back on top of him.

He felt dizzy and Temple encouraged him to rest. Ronnie refused to listen. He continued to dig.

Then he fainted.

His uncle found him.

It was dark by then. His mother had searched the woods on foot without success and called her brother. Uncle Dan came in his copter and skimmed low over the woods, powerful searchlights stab-

bing down. He saw the little hut in the clearing, the mound of fresh earth, the hole, and Ronnie's exhausted, sleeping body.

He landed next to the hut, pulled Ronnie out, took him straight to the hospital. They made Ronnie's mother stay away till they had tested and found him free of radioactivity.

Ronnie was better in the morning, but the notes on his chart added up to nervous exhaustion. He'd have to stay in the hospital for a while.

His mother was there, and his Uncle Dan, and another man. They all looked pretty serious.

The other man was from the government. He wanted to know all about it. But Ronnie didn't want to tell. He had to protect Mr. Temple. He didn't want them filling in the hole again so he'd have to start all over again somehow—maybe from someplace else, with a tunnel . . .

But his mother said he had to tell, that it was very serious. His Uncle Dan said so, too.

So he told the government man the whole story, and the man took notes.

When he finished, the man snapped his notebook shut and said something about remanding Ronnie to the custody of his mother, after hospitalization, pending disposition of his case in juvenile court. Probably in a judge's chambers, the government man said. He didn't think in view of Ronnie's age and his full cooperation with the authorities, that the judge would do more than give him a good talking to.

They didn't tell Ronnie what they planned to do about Mr. Temple. He tried to talk to the buried man by telepathy, but the distance must have been too great.

Ronnie found out what happened to Temple two nights later. Ronnie had gone to the bathroom down the hall long after lights out and on his way back to bed he heard the radio playing softly in the night nurse's room. The news program was on. Ronnie tiptoed to the door and listened.

The decontamination corps had dug up Temple's container. It had taken great earth-moving machines to do it. The thing had been about a quarter mile down. So of course Ronnie never would have reached it.

Temple had talked to them, told them the same story he'd told Ronnie. But he didn't mention Ronnie till they did, apparently to protect the boy.

The container was hot. There must have been a hit near it, soon after it was buried, which unearthed it and exposed it to radiation. Then, years later, it had been plowed under again by the Moon ships.

The decontamination corps had handled it by remote, with their special devices. Then they mounted a twenty-four hour guard over it while the Council went into extraordinary session. Four hours and twelve minutes later the Council members emerged with their decision.

Ten to two against Temple.

The two council members in their joint dissenting opinion argued for removing the container to a non-populated area and opening it there, using proper safeguards. They argued for Temple on humane grounds, and on the basis of historical value and furtherance of scientific knowledge—but chiefly on grounds of humanity.

But the majority mentioned humanity, too; the humanity they knew and were sworn to protect. In this case the greatest protection lay in disposing of the container, unopened, as safely and speedily as possible.

As for its contents—Temple might be all he said he was . . . but he might be something utterly different. They had only his word, and it wasn't enough. Earth had escaped destruction once by a hair's breadth. Nothing—no one per-

(*Concluded on page* 65)

TARZAN NEVER DIES!

Here is an article which represents a challenge to all those millions in whose mind Tarzan still lives. And along with Tarzan, all our other friends, such as John Carter of Mars; La of Opar; Tars, Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark; Manu the Monkey; The Great White Apes; Numa, the Lion; the Holy Therns; the Waziri; the Firstborn . . . and many more, none of whom will ever die within our memories where we cherish their wonderful adventures, never before equalled, and unequalled since. But Edgar Rice Burroughs, their creator, is dead. His typewriter is silent. And down the musty corridors of the world's bookstalls stalk the ghosts of adventure, at bay at last, trapped in the past, never more to battle for their lives against impossible odds, nevermore to rescue their mates from dangers unmentionable, nevermore to thrill us, except in retrospect, with red-blooded adventure exciting beyond all imagination. Aye! It is a prospect to make even the gods weep!

I knew John Carter personally. That's how I knew how real he was. I met him much later than Tarzan, for I grew up with Tarzan. There never was any question in my youthful mind that Tarzan was real. Had anyone asked me, I could have answered triumphantly with his real name, Lord Greystoke, of England, and none could have swayed me from the conclusiveness of this proof! Today I might feel a bit sheepish about it, but the knowledge that I was not alone comforts me, nay, makes me proud. For here is vindication. Here is proof of the real talent of the greatest of all writers, Edgar Rice Burroughs. He fooled me! Completely. Along with hundreds of thousands of others. George Washington may have been a myth, but Tarzan really lived!

When I first met John Carter, he was equally vivid in my mind, and perhaps I loved him more than I loved Tarzan, because the bent of my mind was toward more fantastic imaginings, toward other worlds, lands beyond the stars. Yet, knowing he was fiction bothered me not a whit. When he lost his Dejah Thoris, I wept. When he found her, I cried with joy. When he carved his way to her side with his mighty broadsword, I screamed with excitement. And when he clasped her once more in his arms, I almost swooned with passion, such was my happiness. So, imagine, if you can, my pleasure at meeting him!

Yes, I met John Carter. Not only did I meet him, but I planned with him his next adventures! And at my behest, novel after novel rolled from the typewriter of Edgar Rice Burroughs, all of those last famous books that mark the end of a great writer's career. Yes, I treasure those last days. I was editor of *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* then, and as editor, I persuaded Edgar Rice Burroughs to write these new novels for me, novels

that would never have been written otherwise. I persuaded him, some think, to obtain the famous man for my magazines, to increase their circulations to the (then) world's greatest in the fiction field. But I'm going to tell you a secret now that I've never told anyone before. The real reason I worked so hard to convince Edgar Rice Burroughs to write for *Amazing Stories,* was because I was hungry for more John Carter. I, personally, wanted to read more of those magnificent novels! It was the most selfish action in the world, in one respect, and as it turned out, the most generous—for millions the world over enjoyed with me these new adventures of those characters who can never die. The thought of that pleases me more than any memory of my past activities. To link my name with that of John Carter, in actuality! To be responsible for some of his adventures! What greater ambition can a boy have! What more tremendous attainment!

Today, when I pick up my tattered copy of *The Gods Of Mars,* I am overwhelmed with emotion. I handle the book as tenderly as though it were the most priceless of rare editions. To me, technically, this book is the best of all Burroughs' creations. It is his masterpiece. It is within its pages that Mars becomes more real to me than my own planet! This book, and *The Moon Maid,* I consider the epitome of story-telling, true literature, examples of the writing art which can stand the assault of time, and which stand as targets for every writer who has his soul in his writing, and who desires to attain perfection. How many times have I re-read them both? You would smile and say: "He must know them by heart!" That I do! Oft in the night, I walk through the Valley Dor, musing upon the heroic deeds that once transpired here. Again, in my mind, I see Tars Tarkas, the giant Thark, as he battles beside John Carter, against the great white apes while the death call of the Holy Therns rings out from the high cliffs all about. And sometimes, after I drop off to sleep, my subconscious mind devises new fantasies so engrossing that awaking enrages me.

Today I am still hungry for more John Carter. Oh what I wouldn't give to pick up new novels and follow new adventures of all those wonderful characters I love so well, and who are more than characters, but real, living people. In my mind they stand beside the memory pictures of other living people, as equal as flesh and bold—and they will be ever so. In my mind's eye, I can see Tars Tarkas' great eye, twinkling upon me with ferocious humor, and a wave of affection sweeps over me.

It is not enough to say Tarzan can never die! That is small solace for the fact that his is a living death! Forever, like a puppet, he must now swing through the trees only on the vines of the past. All he can do is re-enact what he has already done. Not one more banth can John Carter slay, but only those already stiffened in their dried blood! The pity of it!

For Tarzan is not dead! Nor are hundreds of questions we can ask that remain unanswered. One example: what about La of Opar? Is she never to attain any true happiness? Is that incredibly lovely woman doomed forever to remain among the troglodytes of Opar, with no prospect for a mate save a beastly half-human? You could, in ten minutes, phrase five hundred such questions. What about the ninth Barsoomian Ray; or the *tenth?* What about Kar Komak, that one lonely Phantom Bowman who became flesh? What about the religion of Mars, now left without one? Will the Holy Therns one day try to restore the ancient religion of Issus? The Great White Apes; what about them? Several times we saw them trying to become men—and almost succeeding. Will they ever succeed, and

what will happen if they do?

For years these questions have plagued me. The realization that they could never be answered caused an actual sense of sorrow, of loss. Sometimes I half-hoped when I saw a new Tarzan movie announced—and returned from it so sadly disillusioned that I swore never to go to another. No one, it seemed, could take up where the great Edgar Rice Burroughs left off. John Coleman Burroughs, his son, tried it. With all respect to a great man's son, it just didn't jell.

Many times I visited with J. Allen St. John, the famous illustrator of the Tarzan and Mars stories, a personal friend of ours. There I saw several new pieces of Tarzan art. A new painting of Tarzan, a thrilling, nostalgic thing. But always it is the same—we talk of the glorious past. To St. John, Dejah Thoris IS the most beautiful woman two worlds have ever known. He has painted her many times. Her image is always in his mind as a mental model for any woman he paints. He loves her as much as John Carter does!

Turning to platitudes, we say that in that Land where we'll once more meet Edgar Rice Burroughs, perhaps he'll continue the adventures of his characters for our enjoyment. How could it be Heaven otherwise! And on this last mournful note we sink back, reach for our tattered copy of *The Gods Of Mars,* and retrace our steps into the past, for that is all we have left. And like introverts, we retreat into ourselves, and look out upon a world that has taken so much anticipation from us with a snarl of futility.

Tarzan can never die, but he might just as well! 'Twould save the poignant pangs of longing that assail us always.

And yet, the other day it happened. I could hardly believe my eyes, but when I realized what I had in my hands, I questioned not, or hesitated, but plunged into what has since become the prime adventure of my reading life—for what my eyes beheld, in words, was a familiar character, La of Opar, for whom the High Priest, patient no longer, had come to make her his mate. At last her most feared hour was upon her—and in her heart she knew she would not live the night through, for rather than mate with this horribly stunted, hairy beast, she would die at her own hand.

One hundred thousand words later I was in ecstacy, the happiest man alive —for all my questions had been answered, and I knew at last what had happened to Kar Komak, who was the *true* Issues, and how Mars got back its ancient religion! No longer was *The Gods Of Mars* the best of the Burroughs books—here at last was a better! Here at last was the supreme novel, the book for which all the others were only preparation, only plot-shadows casting before them the portent of the giant to come! Here was the book that welded the whole series into one complete, magnificent plot, cohesive in every unit, from the Apeman himself to Jason Gridley.

And on the heels of this came the most unkind barb of all—for to read this great novel is forbidden! No man may read it. It cannot be published, for to do so is plagiarism. And this is one plagiarism that nobody could get away with. Legal action would be swift and relentless.

Is there no way! we demanded. And the answer was as cold as ice: No, there is nothing to be done.

If a man writes a novel for his own enjoyment, he can write what he will. He can use any character he pleases. It is legal. It is not plagiarism. But let him sell it, or publish it, and he faces the law. If a man wishes to build himself a patented machine, he can do so, for use in his own home. Even to the label. None can stay him. But let him try to sell it, and the patent law is

invoked upon him.

There is only one way: to get permission from the copyright owners or the patent owners.

This novel that I have read (I cannot say who wrote it); would you like to read it? Is there a Tarzan or John Carter fan the world over who would not? Would you like to read this, and *many more?* There is only one way it will ever come about, and that is to convince the copyright owners of a proposition I am about to make in the following words. It is presented to you readers as a challenge. The results will be up to you.

I hereby propose that the Edgar Rice Burroughs interests nominate a *successor* to Edgar Rice Burroughs to continue the adventures of all his famous characters. I further propose that they nominate a man who has proved he can continue in the high standard and tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs, as based on 100,000 words already written. I propose that Tarzan and all his friends be allowed to live again, and walk once more through the pages of the books of the land, for the enjoyment of the millions of fans everywhere.

Certainly the Burroughs interests stand to profit immensely. All the author requires is a fair remuneration for his work. He is willing to sacrifice all personal rights in the stories he shall create, except those which come under the fair remuneration already mentioned.

In the interests of perpetuating these beloved characters, and making possible their future adventures, which I am now more hungry than ever to read, I propose to handle the task of convincing the Burroughs interests of their proper course, and of the huge fortune such a decision can and will make them. The way to accomplish that task is simple—that of public opinion. If enough public interest can be demonstrated, the rest should be easy.

Therefore, to begin with, I am asking every Burroughs fan who reads this to send me his name and address with these simple words: "I'll back you up on Tarzan!" When I have enough names and addresses, I will contact each and every one of you, and instruct you as to the next step. Can I get 100,000 names on my desk within the next 60 days? If you'll send me yours, it will be a start—and if you'll go out and contact every other Tarzan fan you know of, who might not read this magazine, and get him to do the same thing, it won't be any trick at all!

Naturally this is going to cost me money, and I'm prepared to spend it. I must spend it! It cannot be that this wonderful novel never become more than a pile of manuscript pages written for the personal satisfaction of one Burroughs fan who so loved his characters that he did a thing never heard of before—wrote his own novel, for his own pleasure, knowing it could not profit him a nickle! He has the world's largest cross-file of information, concerning every book, every incident, every character in Burroughsiana. He is, to my mind, the only man who has both the ability, and the familiarity with the characters, necessary to continue the Burroughs stories in a manner indetectable from that of the master himself!

If I fail, none of you will ever read what happened to La of Opar, and to Kar Komak, and to Tarzan and John Carter as they fight back to back on Mars. Nor will you ever know the identity of the man who has written it, for there is but one manuscript, and it is his. And it will be a great pity.

If any of you care to assist me in the cost, say by sending a dime, I will put it into a "Dimes for Tarzan" fund, and use it to create the gigantic wave of public opnion which is the only possible way to convince the proper person that what I have proposed is the thing to do.

But it is not really necessary, for I will do it alone if you do not wish to help. My own prayers have been an-

swered, and my joy has overwhelmed me. For me, Tarzan is far from dead! Deeds unknown to millions of his fans, are already familiar parts of my memory of him—and what great deeds they are! I shall never forget that fantastic leap that Tarzan made that saved the armies of La, and of Tars Tarkas, from certain death in the rising waters of the Gorge of Tarnath. Nor shall I ever forget . . . but why speak of it? The mention can but whet an appetite that may never be satisfied.

Send me your name and address, and tell me you are willing to help. If it were Tarzan, he would spring instantly to *your* aid. And all you have to lick is a 3c stamp!

Do it now, and round up everybody else you can find. Write to: *Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisconsin.*

THE END

"I don't remember the name or the author, but it's all about robots and page 24 has peanut butter stains—"

WHEN I GROW UP

(*Concluded from Page* 60)

son—was worth the risk again.

Temple's container was lifted by a huge grapple at the end of a cable from a copter and taken out to sea. There it was dropped, grapple and cable with it, into one of the ocean deeps, far from shipping lanes.

Ronnie's secret place and an acre of the woods around it was cordoned off as a taboo area until it could be plowed under.

Ronnie crept back to bed. He lay there with clenched fists, trying not to cry. He was twelve—going on thirteen—and big boys don't cry.

He said into the darkness:

"Sorry, Mr. Temple. Awfully sorry . . . . I can't do anything now. But when I grow up . . . I won't be a Moon pilot. I'll study science and find a way. I'll find you . . . when I grow up . . ."

His cheeks were wet when he finally fell asleep.

THE END

COSMIC CIRCUS TENT

By William C. Hoch, Jr.

BURTON HANLEY, his mind made up to listen to every speech, no matter how trivial, in his freshmen year as ambassador, yanked his heavyboned frame upright in the plush chair. His frosty eyes mirrored the vast luminosity of the Plexiglas ceiling in what he hoped would pass as a reflective mood as he fidgeted with the headset which always pinched his ears. An hour of speeches left his ears feeling frostbitten.

The staccato Oxonian accent of the English interpretor who was translating the Yemenite's comments on the 1958 appointees to the International Telecommunications Union rattled on his eardrums. He doodled with his right ear lobe which projected under the headphone. At times the translators actually seemed to be ahead of the speakers. The speed of the translators was the most fascinating thing he had discovered in his first month at the U. N.

His eyes wandered to the hawk-beaked man who held the floor.

The delegate's trim black beard waggled hypnotically. Hanley began to picture him as a billy goat when he was distracted by a stir at the nearest exit.

Foreign delegates poured from their chairs and bustled out the door. A page dashed down the aisle and bent over Hanley.

"Something awful queer is going on outside, Mr. Hanley!" he panted, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles and nodding at the door.

Jerking the headset from his tingling ears with a soft sigh, Hanley tramped up the aisle after the running messenger.

In the lobby, a blinding light poured through the vaulted wall glass and sanded his eyes. He threw his arm across his face and wheeled from the molten sky. Thirty seconds later as the sting subsided, he peered cautiously about. The intolerable light gave the interior a brightness higher than Elbow Beach at noon. A multi-lingual babble swelled about him. Islamites muttered fierce

A circus tent is generally associated with laughter and gaiety and celebration, but not the Cosmic Circus Tent. You might say it was a case of a curtain for the world, or curtains for the world.

prayers toward Mecca. Voluble Europeans clustered in small groups, arguing excitedly with hand and voice, advancing new theories and deriding old ones.

Hanley shielded this face with a note pad and looked around the chromium and glass tower of Babel. Aleskey Donskoi stood alone and held his thick hands like a visor over his brow. His ursine body was firmly planted on the pilings of his legs, and his bleak face wore an inscrutable, somber look. Under the strange brilliance his white hair glowed like a mountaincap of snow.

Burton Hanley, distressed by the resurrected memory of Kurusu and Nomura with whom he had conferred on Pearl Harbor Day when he was an assistant secretary, began to cross to the immobile ambassador when the page caught his sleeve and pressed a teletype message in his hand.

The brightness blanketed the country. San Francisco, Seattle, and Chicago sent sketchy reports pleading for an explanation. Radio interference cut off South America, but a wire had been picked up from the embassy in Mexico City. The glare was there. As he jammed the note in his pocket, another decoded memo was handed to him. The London cable reported the strange brilliance in the western sky washed out the setting sun and renewed the noon.

Running his finger back and forth inside his damp collar, Hanley picked his way to Donskoi. They faced each other silently a moment. "What do you make of this phenomenon, Mr. Ambassador?" Hanley challenged at last.

The Russian hunched his thick shoulders and spread his stubby fingers. Hanley instinctively believed he, at least, was not in on it.

"Do you have a theory, Mr. Donskoi? Any ideas?"

"*Nyet!* I wait to hear from my government. That is all." Donskoi rumbled in thick stumbling English.

The Iron Curtain bloc began to assemble near Donskoi. Hanley realized his presence made them mute and backed off politely, wondering whether his eyes were becoming adjusted to the odd radiance or if the intensity really were waning. He hadn't conceived this as anything but a local, temporary condition, accidentally or intentionally caused by humans. Now it occurred to him something incomprehensible, perhaps final, might be coming to pass. Perhaps this was simply Doom's Day. He dried his moist palms on his charcoal-gray worsted jacket. The crowd hadn't thinned any, even though the loudspeakers crackled a continuous announcement of adjournment. Reassemble the following Monday, *unless circumstances forbade it*, it cried in French. Hanley detected an ascetic note in the Gallic pronouncement. It had the detached tone of a sports-caster reporting the blow-by-blow pulverization of a World's Champion. *There will always be a champion,* it seemed to imply.

When he left the high-speed elevator on the ground floor, he knew the luminosity was diminished. As he came out of the building his chauffer signalled to him and held the door while Hanley climbed into the tonneau of his black limousine. Now he was conscious only of an overall greenness in the atmosphere which he attributed to the red-fatigue of his retinas. The light was almost normal for this hour of the afternoon.

A sick, green sun hung isolated in the cloudless sky.

The car edged into the congestion on 48th Street where thick clusters of pedestrians swelled like fat bunches of grapes into the highway from the thin vine of sidewalk. A heavy muster of police fought to create lanes for the official cars that crawled among them, sirens bleating.

"What happened, boss?" Hanley's driver asked him.

"You know as much about it as I do, Reese. Perhaps more. I was in the assembly hall when it began. Just how did it start?"

Reese shoved his dinky cap back on his black, lustrous hair, snatched his sunglass off, and rubbed his ruddy lantern jaw with one hand while he spun the wheel with the other. "Well, I was driving down Fifth when all of a sudden like, a blinding flash goes off in front of me. I thought a bomb or something went off down the avenue. I jams on the brakes, and all the traffic around me does likewise. It was too bright to see. Then I scrounges down, sort of expecting a big bang. But nothing comes. No noise at all. I dug my sunglasses out of the glove compartment, thought of all this civil defense stuff, and left the car to go into the lobby of a tall building. It was mobbed. A couple of dames fainted. One guy in the back with a shaggy beard was hollering about the end of the world and telling us to repent. Plenty of people were down on their knees. It got stuffy, so I decided to get out and see what's up. But even with the Polaroids, wow, did my eyes sting?

Hanley leaned back and rubbed his neck against the cool, leather cushions. "There didn't seem to be any special source of the flash, any focal point? It didn't grow or fan out from any one sector?"

Reese lurched around a red emergency wagon, claxon blasting, and replied studiously, "No-o-o. All of a sudden, there it was. One second it's peaceful as ever in the traffic, then, *bingo!* Lit up like Kelley's Uncle Mike on the seventeenth of March."

The car nosed west off Broadway onto Ninety-sixth, almost home to his town house. Hanley closed his eyes and probed his firm fingers over his throbbing sinuses. The light was instantaneous. It burned fiercely for ten minutes, then waned. Maybe it was a cosmic disturbance like the northern lights. The newsboys marked the corners like sentinal buoys, waiting for the extras. He was too close to home to fiddle with the car radio. He wanted that moment to rest and think.

The car crept to the curb in front of his brownstone house. Edna, his wife, opened the great, yellow door and stretched a reassuring hand to him. As he bent to receive her kiss, he noticed his saddle-leather Gladstone in the vestibule behind her.

"Washington just hung up," she said evenly. "The president wants you down there to-night. Tell Reese not to put the car away."

"I'll catch the Congressional Limited," he replied. "It'll be faster, and I can catch a catnap. Have Lucille call and reserve me a roomette."

"Lucille's in the kitchen. I'll call myself. What do you make of this, Burton?"

"I don't know. I know as little as you, maybe less." His shoulders trembled from a ticklish chill. "Things seem to be back to normal now," he added wishfully.

"Would the president send for you if things were really normal? Is it the Reds?" she inquired as if she were asking whether the rain had stopped.

Burton Hanley felt a cool disturbing shiver run all the way through him as if he had just met himself coming out of his past when he caught her violet eyes, so distractingly out of place in the pat-

rician, pale face framed by fading straw-blonde hair.

"Good Lord, I don't think so, Edna!" he said harshly. "Must it always be the Reds? Just when I suspected we were getting some place with them at last, this happens. I wonder. I only had a moment with Donskoi, but he gave me the impression he was as mystified as I What does the radio say?"

"Not a thing! All the stations are jammed with frantic newscasts about the hundreds of people turning up with 'sunburn' and 'snow-blindness,' but that's all. They don't have the scantest idea of what caused the blooming thing. But there are scads of notions. CBS scooped the others and put a Columbia physics professor on the air."

"What did he say caused it?"

"Nothing, in toto! He mentioned six or seven conflicting possibilities, all fantastic, and more or less admitted he was stumped. But he made it sound as if he knew something, and he *was* first. I have an idea the brass might be in on it, but they aren't talking. But of course the big commentators haven't had their crack at it. I imagine when Emerson Ryder Prawn comes on at eight, he'll have worked it out."

"Yes, I dare say he will," Hanley said acidly. "I better hurry. You don't mind staying home, Eddie?"

She tilted her chin and oscillated her queenly head slowly. "Poor darling, I'm inured to it. Call me?"

"As soon as I get out of the meeting if they'll let me. I'll try to stay at the *Mayflower*. Goodbye, dear."

Reese took his bag and drove him to Penn Station. Two men waiting there escorted him to his roomette.

In Washington he was mildly surprised to find the pair of men, who identified themselves as F. B. I. agents, waiting for him. They left the station to-gether and entered a private car which sped him directly to the White House. They drove through the pack of clamoring newsmen outside the main gate and delivered him to the door of the meeting room. In the conference room the cabinet ringed the table, and the president sat at its head. Three men he had never seen before sat at its foot.

"Right on time, Burton," the president said, glancing at his watch. "Looks like *The Big Brass Band* is all assembled. Sit down." He smiled and indicated a chair near him. "What do you make of our pyrotechnic display this afternoon? Think our eastern comrades had anything to do with it?"

Hanley shook his head. "I doubt it, chief. But don't ask me why."

The president grinned, flashing his even white teeth, the most famous denture in the land. "Gosh. I'm glad you had faith. They didn't do it."

"You mean our side did it?" Hanley demanded incredulously.

"No. No indeed! It came from the Big Boss upstairs." He pointed his thumb at the ceiling. "So far, only Malcolm and Ira and myself have been briefed on it." Malcolm Magruder of Defense and Umberdorf of Commerce nodded wryly. "But these scientists will tell us about it. Gentlemen!"

The tall, ascetic man squinting through thick lenses that could have been ground from the same prescription at the 400 inch mirror, rose first. "Good evening, gentlemen," he croaked, peering about. "I'm Dr. Evan-Hirsch."

Some of the cabinet knew the astronomer, but a murmur went up among the others. Hanley wondered how Evan-Hirsch happened to be in from Palomar.

Evan-Hirsch explained the cause of the burst. A giant star one hundred light years away exploded in an unprecedented manner with undreamed violence. Perhaps it had been a double star, perhaps an entire galaxy exploding in a chain reaction set off by an energy unbalancing interchange of satellites. Regardless, the expanding sphere of light generated

a century ago had just passed over the earth. The atmosphere, fortunately, had screened most of the ultra-violet. Most of those burned would recover. Evan-Hirsch established the position of the former star and the violence of its eruption through the red shift. He was also aware of its make-up. It had contained an enormous amount of actinium. Evan-Hirsch sat down.

The cabinet officers heaved back in their swivel chairs and glanced at each other apprehensively. The astronomer's voice had been placid, chilled, expositional. But still there was a note of something left unsaid.

The president gestured and the youngest man in the trio rose.

"Armand Feniere, sirs," he announced. Hanley stared at the nuclear physicist. He hadn't imagined Feniere was so young. Not much more than thirty, he judged. A shock of brown hair stood off like the horn of a unicorn at the front of his head, and his liquid black eyes cast flintlike sparks. Feniere braced his supple lean body, clasped his hands behind him, and began to speak in a pointed voice that impaled the politicians in their chairs.

From Evan-Hirsch's spectra, Feniere knew another wave of radiation, Beta rays, was headed through space and would eventually reach the earth. Actinium emits Beta only. These Beta rays would travel at about half the speed of light according to the calculated speed of the star's deterioration. The rate of decomposition of the actinium and the small amounts of Uranium Z and Y created forecasted the arrival time of the destructive radiation. It would blanket the earth, destroying or contaminating every animal and plant and patch of soil it contacted.

The members of the cabinet squirmed like a canfull of fishing worms.

"But since you said this particular Beta radiation is travelling at half the speed of light," the president said, "and Dr. Evan-Hirsch told us the explosion occurred one hundred years ago, that means the deadly radiation won't reach us for another one hundred years."

"That's correct," Feniere replied and was seated.

Hanley tried to shake off the tightness in his throat and his joints. He lurched forward and leaned his elbows on the table. Someone handed him a glass of cool water and faded back into the shadows. He saw a phantom smile fleet across the president's taut mouth before the veil of concern dropped over the dedicated eyes once more.

The third man, a portly chap with iron-gray hair that curled and twisted like lathe shavings, stood up. He twisted his thumb in a gold chain that formed sweeping catenaries across his vast vest and said, "I am Borshevsky! The velocity of the radiation determined by Armand tells me the rays will reach the orbit of the earth in 98.7835 sidereal years. It will arrive at two forty-seven a.m., Eastern Standard Time, on August second, in 2056 A.D. At that time, gentlemen, the following areas will be exposed to the direction of the blast, focused on sixty-four degrees, eighteen minutes North latitude and fifty-nine degrees, forty-six minutes East longitude, and will receive a destructive amount of radiation: upper Finland, the Novaya Zemlya peninsula, northernmost Mongolia, an edge of China, . . . and most of the Soviet Union!"

He smiled lopsidedly, bowed low, and sat down. The room was silent until Ira Umberdorf whacked the table and roared. "Well, gents, why so glum? That'll give the Russkys something to think about! Anyways, it's a hundred years away. Let's get something in to drink!"

Some of the others shuffled their feet and looked to the president who sat back stiffly, staring moodily at each in turn.

Hanley fractured the silence. "What will our policy be, Mr. President? I need something to go on at the next U.

N. session. Will this news be declassified?"

"Not right away," the president muttered. "There will be a good deal of speculation for awhile, but we may hold it in check as there will be no follow up on our lifetimes. We need time to plan. Hold off a bit and State will advise you."

"But if Russia learns all this, as she doubtlessly will, what then? Will she sit back and face her destruction, even if it's a century away? And what debt do we owe the future of the race? Can we afford to have half the world laid waste?"

The president was tense. "I know, Burton, I know. The *Band* here will will have to give these problems a good healthy think. We received the focal rays of light from the blast so I doubt whether Russia has made the calculations our men have. They didn't have any direct light to measure from their observatories. They'll have to assimilate their data from us and observers outside their own country."

Hanley got upset. "As I see it, we have three problems to consider. One, Russia may attack to move their government and people from the doomed land; two, we owe it to the generations beyond our grandchildren to protect them from this blast if possible, from our vantage point in their past. Many will no doubt be caught in it otherwise. Arable acreage will be runied. Three, we can't predict the political situation a century from now. Maybe Russia will be an essential ally then! Maybe we'll be invaded from outer space! Can we chance having half a planet if that happens?" Hanley was up on his toes, shouting, his voice climbing like the scream of a jet. As he finished he dropped to the balls of his feet but still held himself erect, glaring at the assemblage with the Calvinistic wrath of his puritan heritage. His knotty hands stroked the dusting of white at the temples of his dark hair, and his eyes glittered like ice cubes.

"Is there any way out?" the Secretary of the Interior asked.

The three scientists shook their heads in cadence.

Hanley flopped in his chair and picked at the table edge with his fingernail.

"Aw, what the deuce, we won't be around when it happens anyway!" Umberdorf bawled. "Let's figure how we can hush this up. We'll have a panic on our hands if this leaks out, mark my words!"

Back at the U. N. Monday morning, Hanley was handed a report from General Ross in Intelligence. The Russians had mustered all the roofing laborers in Moscow and had worked around the clock to sheathe the Kremlin with lead sheeting. Several of the walls had to be buttressed to bear the added weight.

Conditioned by this disturbing knowledge, he entered the chamber. Donskoi was already in his place, his gambler's face nerveless. But the Muscovite's hands clenched a giveaway sheaf of notes.

As soon as the assembly was in session, Donskoi succeeded in wresting the floor from the Venezuelan delegate.

"I wish to propose," he cried, "that all countries pool their knowledge of the recent explosions!"

The chairman answered smoothly. "I'm sure we all want to know what caused the freak light to which you refer, but you'll have to make yourself more explicit than that."

"They know what I mean!" Donskoi shrilled, shaking his fistfull of papers at Burton Hanley.

"Is the delegate of the Soviet Union accusing the United States of responsibility for that phenomenon?"

"Blah! They claim they invent everything from lamp bulb to ot'mobile to cotton gin and steamboat! But even those warmongers can't claim to invent this explosion!"

Burton grinned wryly. "I'm sure the peace-mongers will be safe in their lead covered cottage. They have more lead on their little domicile than we have mortgage on our White House."

Donskoi glowered, but most of the other delegates ringed around the hall looked puzzled. Their countries hadn't unraveled the riddle of the blast.

"What you know 'bout this thing?" Donskoi bellowed belligerantly. "We are not so dumb as you wish we are, Mr. Hanelya! We know what happen! We measure light reflected from moon! We know what comes. But we are not sure in the timing. Show us your calculations!"

"I'll take it up with my government," Hanley said, looking anxiously around the circle of white faces.

"Da, please do," the Russian retorted in a voice larded with sarcasm. "We like to know by next week what plans to make. Our generals grow impatient!"

A gasp followed by an excited rattling of briefcases and whispered questions swirled around the room like the eddys of wind that precede a tornado. Hanley's eyes were slits of lustrous blue. *So,* he surmised, *they are close.* Only they had to rely on questionable scientists, most likely kidnapped Germans, to do their calculations. What an opportunity for a captured scientist to betray and destroy his captor nation! Russia had to check her figures! Had her scientists told her how far off the radiation really was? And had they told her honestly which side of the planet would face it? Hanley and Donskoi were motionless as they studied each other across the aisle. At last the Russian turned away, picked up his notes and went away.

Hanley waited until he got home to call the White House. When he got his call through, the press secretary answered.

"Oh, it's you, Burton," the secretary said.

"I have to speak to the chief right away," Hanley snapped.

"He's in conference. What's on your mind, Burton?"

"Look, call me as soon as he gets through, will you?"

"I don't know. He'll probably be tied up a long while. He's in a confab with Ira and Malcolm."

"But I should think he'd be calling me! Listen, do you know what Donskoi pulled to-day?"

"Sure. I read all about it in the *Post.* The chief wants you to stall him off. Calm him down. And the chief's pretty sore about a leak on that lead business in Moscow. Did you see the stock quotes to-day?"

"No."

"St. Joe's Lead closed up three points on the Big Board. Malcolm's real peeohed, real put out, if you get me. That will raise holy hob with the defense budget and stock-piling program. That's what has Ira steamed up, too. The Commerce Department will get it in the neck from business if commodities climb out of hand because of government rumors."

"That's just too damn bad about them!" Hanley roared into the phone. "I didn't leak it!"

"Ouch! Take it easy, Burton. My ears! I'll give the chief your tale of woe when I see him. But Defense and Commerce have asked for a 'go-slow' so be guided accordingly. I have to scoot! Smedley of International Smelting just came in for his appointment. So long, Burton!"

Hanley rammed the phone into its cradle.

"What is it, dear?" Edna's voice fanned him like a fresh breeze.

"Go-slow! Go-slow! What kind of policy is that? Go slowly to perdition! They don't know Donskoi like I do. He isn't kidding this time. This may be what the Kremlin needs to goad their people into a Holy War that will bail them out of their Five Year mess at

home!"

"But the president will listen."

"I can't get through to him. The Defense Department has bottled him up. He probably doesn't even realize it. The brass is running the ball in D.C. right now. Maybe the chief isn't even in the District. Get me a seat on the next Boston flight, Edna, and have them reserve a room for me."

"Why are you going to Boston, Burt?"

"It's just a hunch. I want to talk to Feniere at M. I. T. again. If anybody can figure a way out of this, I think he might."

Armand Feniere greeted Hanley with a look of surprise the next morning when Hanley marched into his laboratory. "I didn't think they'd send you, Mr. Hanley," he said. "I didn't expect to be approached this way."

"This way?"

"I've been trying to contact Washington to learn their plans and find out what I should work on. But I couldn't get through. Aren't you here to bring their instructions?"

Hanley stared at the young physicist a long time, then, satisfied by what he saw, he said, "Armand, they want to stall. But I'm afraid we haven't time for a waiting game. The Russians know, or at least suspect, about as much as we do. Isn't there some solution to ward off this deadly radiation so we can head off a war?"

"I know what you mean," Feniere replied. "I've only been able to come up with one possible answer. But it's strictly hypothetical. It even sounds screwy to me. I don't know enough about the economics or international psycholgy of the thing to know whether it could even work theoretically. But if it could be done, it would work. I've built a pilot radiation plant in there." He pointed at a metal-clad door.

Hanley made copious notes as Feniere reviewed his experiments. As the scientist unfolded his idea, Hanley's heart sank. It was a ridiculous thing to attempt. Without looking into the finances or material availability of the project, he knew it would never work.

But it had to!

Garbed in a tweed sport jacket and chamois slacks, Hanley spent Tuesday running between the public library, his broker's office, and the newspaper morgue while his delegation absorbed abuse without him. He learned, 1. *The annual U. S. mining of lead is about* 505,000 *tons worth about* $150,000,000 *depending on market conditions.* This price would skyrocket in an uncontrolled maret if his plan leaked out. He found, 2. *The world output is estimated to be twice the U. S. consumption.* The U. S. imported as much as it mined, so the world output was about two million tons. And he discovered to his horror through a polarimeter borrowed from a friend at N. Y. U. that, 3. *The area of Russia and her threatened environs is about* 9,000,000 *square miles, exclusive of water!*

He called Washington again that night. The press secretary started to listen to his story, became strangely quiet, and turned the phone over to Secretary of Commerce Ira Umberdorf who told him to take a sedative and go to bed.

Wednesday morning the papers had it. The Russians had laid the claim that deadly radiation was imminent. Donskoi was absent from the U. N. Hanley reached the president at last. The president had no time for fantastic stories. He instructed him to use caution! The air force was alerted. The fleet had put to sea. It's position was ultra-secret. Army leaves were canceled. The radar ring was on twelve-hour, seven-day shifts.

Video Forum grabbed the opportunity to feature Burton Hanley on their discussions that evening. The commander of the New York Department of the American Legion was sent a polite post-

ponement at the last minute. The moderator and producer agreed not to announce his appearance until the program was on the air.

When Hanley arrived at the studio in a taxi that evening, Armand Feniere was with him. As soon as the moderator learned who the physicist was, he consented to put him on the platform.

The five participating columnists strained forward like men at the starting line of a 100 yard dash as Hanley and Feniere took their seats. A red light flashed. It was too late to reconsider.

"Gentlemen," Hanley began in a controlled, level voice, "I plead with you to forego your right granted by this program to throw questions at any point untill I am through with my address."

The moderator lifted his rump off his chair, but Hanley stopped him with an impatient wave of a hand.

Feniere presented his discussion first. He explained the approaching radiation and established it a century away. Then he waved a glossy sheet of flexible material. The newsmen gaped at it hungrily. The physicist explained this sheet, developed by him, consisted of atomic layers of lead sprayed on a special plastic to form a sandwich hundreds of deckers thick. But the composite was no thicker than a G. I. raincoat though much weightier. The laminations would dampen the intense Beta rays interferentially.

The newsmen were hypnotized. The moderator chewed his nails in full-colored vision of forty-million awed viewers. Telephone lines were blocked by a surge of calls.

Hanley extended his mouth two inches closer to the mike. His voice came flat and hard as formica. His eyeballs were hot circles of sulfur fire on forty-million fluorescent panes of glass suffused with muted rainbow colors. "We have come to you to-night without the authorship of your government because you, the people, are threatened. If not you, it will be your great-grandchildren. Do you owe them anything? If you think you do, this is your way out!

"This is the only solution that will shield the world from the deadly effects of rays from space now a century away but moving toward us as surely as death. We propose to cover the world that is threatened with a tent of lead sheeting! This tent would be constructed bit by bit through the decades and stored in sections at millions of steel poles erected years in advance. A few days before R-Day or Radiation Day, so the earth will not suffer from the lack of sunlight for long, the tents will be raised as one. When the radiation passes, the tents will be lowered. Perhaps from the immense sea of lead our great-grandchildren will erect a monument to our memories.

"But what would all this entail? Because of Mr. Feniere's amazing spray, one pound of lead will spray seventy-five yards of material. But this means *twenty-seven million times one million square yards* of material are needed. We can produce it for about fifty cents a yard—less than the material in your dresses, about one-tenth the cost of the worsted in your suits. But it adds up to 135 *billion dollars a year* to produce the 270 billion yards needed as an annual quota!

"It would syphon off a high percentage of the world's labor force!

"What does this mean to you? This plan would take the entire national budgets of the governments of the United States and Russia! With other countries contributing their share, there will be enough left over in our budgets for necessary welfare measures, but no one could bear the strain of a military budget. This plan will require tight co-operation and complete trust. Our engineers would need free access to such a project. It would consume virtually all our lead, putting atomic projects off for one hundred years! Ladies and gentlemen, I leave it in your hands."

There was no time for questions. They

were off the air. The newshounds clamored about him, but Hanley brushed them aside and fled from the station.

Riding back to his town house, a peculiar limpidness settled over him. His big joints were balls of gelatin set in foam rubber sockets. A vague notion that he had gone too far, a mile too far, a hundred light years too far, oppressed him. He saw a motto his father hung on his wall when he was a little boy. It was the motto of his New England. It fit. *Nothing is opened more times by mistake than the mouth!*

Edna handed him an opened telegram when he arrived at his house past the dark forms lurking near the buildings at the corners of the block. Two strangers played checkers in his living room. He pulled the wire from its envelope.

RESIGNATION DEMANDED IMMEDIATELY FOR UN POST STOP CONSIDER SELF UNDER HOUSE ARREST BY SPECIAL ORDER PRESIDENT STOP MALCOLM MAGRUDER

"What did you think of my performance, Eddie?" he asked sourly.

"You were divine! Better than Orson Welles!" she breathed. "Too damned good! It's what the people need. Only they won't buy it. They'll figure they can't have a tax reduction for a hundred years!"

"I thought I made that clear," he answered. "I've a headache. I think I'll turn in." He brushed his lips over her calm mouth.

She clutched his lapels and kissed him fervently.

Hanley slept like his bed was a hollow log full of ants. He woke at seven the next morning dog-tired but unable to garnish another wink. The man on duty in his living room greeted him civily and allowed him to step out on the street for the paper. The reporters had been evicted from the block. The day was overcast.

The paper was a bulldog edition from the evening before. As he knew it would be, his story was splashed over the front page. It was straight reporting; there had been no time in the newsroom for analysis.

Hanley went into the living room and looked at the secret service man. The fellow was too polite to be a cop. Why didn't he act unreasonable and snarl orders? People out of character bothered him.

Announcers on every radio station were warming to the subject. Russia would never agree. Congress would never agree. Defense would never agree. The president would never agree. One commentator went out on a limb and admitted the idea had merit. He was fired.

"I'm not so sure I agree myself, now," Hanley grumbled, as he tugged his satin robe about his sloping shoulders. He decided to go back to sleep. The returns were in. He lost. Should he send a telegram of concession and felicitations? He took a white powder and slept with the righteous inner sense of a cannibal full of missionary.

He swung by his feet; his head was the clapper in a giant bell hung in a soaring tower surrounded by hordes of five-star generals waving W-2 forms. Then he realized the jarring bell was really the signal for him to be lowered through a yawning trapdoor. The cavernous pit beneath was filled with soldiers, lead soldiers. He thrashed about, shrouding himself in the electric blanket like a modernistic mummy. Then he became conscious the jangling came from the phone extension Edna had jacked in beside his bed.

"Burt!" she was crying, "Wake up! Here are the latest papers. I thought you'd want to see them."

"Hunh? What do they want to do with me now, boil me in molten lead?" His eyelids were sheets of gritty sandpaper.

Edna took the call. "I'll have him call

you when he awakens. Thank you," she said sweetly. She nestled the phone. "That was the president."

"What?"

"See the papers?"

He snatched the *Herald-Tribune*. SCRAP LEAD DRIVE TO BE HEADED BY MAYOR was the banner head. He read that the Boy Scouts would make a door to door canvass for lead soldiers, fishing sinkers, balls of foil, anything that might be lying around. There was a picture of an old man gleefully donating his collection of cast British Regiment soldiers.

The Post had trotted out its heaviest type. PLASTIC TYPE PIONEERED BY POST it blared. Newspaper type was being converted to lead spray.

Hanley kicked his feet over the edge of the bed. Edna had even secured a copy of the *Daily Worker*. RUSSIA PLANS WELCOME FOR SCIENTISTS.

Even the *Times* was little more sedate. In 144 point type it proclaimed HANLEY HEADS RUSSIAN MISSION. In 72 point type it added ARMAND FENIERE CHIEF OF TENT PLANNING.

Variety blared HANLEY ATOMIC BARNUM. FENIERE CANVAS BOSS.

"What happened?" Hanley mumbled.

"We—I mean, I—the president—all of us—all but you . . . we misjudged the people! Nineteen fifty eight being election year for congress, the congressmen are home campaigning. They learned the sentiments of the people immediately and burned the lines to D. C."

"You mean, the people want to go ahead and build this canopy?"

"What else can they do?" Edna asked simply. "What meaning could we attach to our lives if the world were to be destroyed in a hundred years?"

"I never thought of it that way. But then, it won't really be destroyed. Only part of it."

"Who can be sure of that?" she asked with womanly logic.

"I'll be darned!" Hanley mused. "But there is so much to be settled . . ."

"The party big-wigs are taking care of everything. You're their showcase hero now. The election is in the bag. The price of lead is frozen at yesterday's close. Congress is working on a new budget. A convoy of generals is already winging to Moscow . . . oh, that reminds me. You have a visitor."

"Who?"

"Wait." She crooked her finger at someone down the hall.

"Mr. Donskoi!"

The stubby Russian paused in the doorway. A slow grin built up slowly on the face Hanley had thought was nerveless marble. "Aleksey, please," he said in thick English. "Please to call me Aleksey, Byur-a-ton."

Hanley beamed. He rose and clapped Donskoi on the shoulder. "You old bear! So you're really going to co-operate!"

"The rulers bow. The Russian soil is sacred to my people," Donskoi said. "I came, you should be first to know. Red Army is now labor force. We will do our share, you should build your tent."

"This demands a drink, Aleksey."

Donskoi beamed. "That is second best proposal you ever made!" he agreed. "I brought special bottle vodka. From my wedding yet. Thirty years old—the last bottle. I save it for big Red victory. I think maybe we drink him now."

Hanley placed two crystal goblets on the bar. The transparent liquid bubbled into them.

Aleksey Donskoi tossed it down with one vast gulp. "Ahh, that was worth thirty years married life," he said with a grin. He refilled his glass. "Here's to our great-grandchildren!"

"May they live in peace!" Hanley toasted.

Aleksey tinkled his glass against Burton's. "They have to! The ways of the Gods are strange, nyet?"

They tipped the goblets and drank solemnly.

THE END

PARADOX LOST

By Stephen Arr

Illustrated by Lawrence

For a little, lost paradox looking for a home, what better place could there be than Raymond's head? It was certainly empty, he'd had only one original thought in his life. There was room enough not only for the paradox, but for some small ideas, some great ideas, a few guesses, and even some jokes and puns. All of this, naturally, made some radical changes in Raymond's way of doing things.

"WELL, its not very pleasant not knowing, I can assure you of that," the lost paradox said earnestly.

"Oh, I don't know," an aphorism replied, mildly contradicting the paradox. It's being that's important. Just say Anon."

"Anon.," the paradox shuddered. "It's like admitting to being a bastard."

"Where am I?" a high, nervous voice demanded.

They all turned tolerantly to look at the new arrival. It was a short joke, slightly off color.

"In the world of ideas," an old, drawn out joke explained kindly, taking a fatherly interest in the newcomer.

"Oh," the short joke said. "My creator was . . . . . ," he added with an air of importance, naming a well known television star.

"See," the paradox said, starting to get excited. "The first thing, 'my creator was.' How can I say Anon., I'll be ostracized."

"If you think he's bad," a trite proverb said, breaking into the conversation, "You should talk to the theories some time, if you can talk to them. They're a highbrow bunch. Try Einstein theory. Him and his MC squared, phooey."

"An M. C. squared? Impossible," the old drawn out joke said. "I've been around a long time and I've seen them all, and I've yet to see a square M. C. They're all lean and tall with lots of teeth."

"You're talking about different MCs," the great idea said in a superior tone.

"Obviously we're talking about different MCs," the old drawn out joke said huffily. "That's just what I said, I've never seen a square MC."

"Haven't you ever been able to find out when you're called back?" a wild guess asked the lost paradox sympathetically.

"I don't get called back very often," the paradox admitted sadly. "And it's probably because I am anon. I'll bet if G. K. Chesterton was my creator I'd get called back a lot."

"But how come you don't know?" the great idea demanded querulously, as though he felt that it was the paradox's fault.

"It was one of those witty parties," the paradox explained bitterly. "Everybody was being very bright and talking at once. Suddenly I found myself out there, in the middle of a crowd of inane puns, and I didn't have the slightest idea where I came from."

"Didn't you investigate," the short joke asked incredulously "It's so important to know. My creator was . . ."

"Of course I investigated," the lost paradox interrupted him savagely. "But nobody was listening to anybody else, only to themselves, so it wasn't possible to find out from anyone but my creator himself. After darting in and out of brains, bumping into jokes and guesses and hopes coming out, I still didn't reach the right person before the party broke up. Once it was over, of course, I came right up here."

"Why?" a Socratic question demanded.

"Why," the lost paradox echoed bewildered, "Why because we always come here."

"Why not go back and find out?" the Socratic question demanded.

"Go back without being called," the lost paradox laughed bitterly. "Where am I going to find a head that's not crammed to overflowing with dreams, ideas, guesses, and hopes. They'd throw me out before I got past the dandruff."

"I know a place," an idea said in a small voice. They all looked at it with interest. It was a very tiny idea, unimportant, not particularly original.

"Where?" the great idea demanded sceptically.

"My creator," the small idea said in a very low, unsure voice.

"Your creator," the great idea sneered.

"Now wait a minute," the aphorism interrupted. "Everyone deserves a chance."

"Why your creator?" he asked the small idea kindly.

"Because," the small idea said, gathering courage, "my creator's head is empty. Nothing from ear to ear."

"No dreams?" a romantic dream demanded incredulously.

"No hopes?" a subconscious wish asked.

"No guesses?" a poor guess blurted out.

"No, no nothing," the small idea replied. "I go back quite often without being called."

"Incredible," the great idea said. "I'd like to check this. Are there any other ideas of his around?"

"No," the small idea said. "I'm the only one."

"You?" the great idea said looking at him in astonishment. "Do you mean that you're the only original idea he's had in all his life?"

"Well, he isn't a bad one," the aphorism said, again coming to the little idea's assistance. "A variation of the old brotherly love and do unto your neighbor's thought."

"An entirely empty head," the old drawn out joke said slowly, a note of greed creeping into his voice.

"I'm sorry," the small idea said, and there was real regret in his voice, "but you can't come."

"What?" the old drawn out joke demanded, stupified.

"I'm sorry," the small idea said firmly. "But he's an awfully nice guy, and there's nothing like an old, drawn out joke to ruin a nice guy."

"Has had only one idea in his life, and he's a nice guy," the old drawn out joke sneered.

"Sure," the lost paradox said. "You don't have to have brains to be a nice guy. As a matter of fact it helps not to have them.

"Will you go down with us?" the small idea asked the great idea humbly.

"Will I go down," the great idea said enthusiastically. "A chance to get back without being called. Try and stop me."

"I'd like a nice congenial crowd," the small idea continued with the stubborn perseverance of the meek. "Something on a high level. Lost paradox, some of the better short jokes, a few advanced theories, a couple of good guesses. You pick them, you know everybody so much better than I."

"Don't worry," the great idea said enthusiastically. "I know the best, and they'll all be raring to go. Even," he said with a wicked smile. "Einstein theory. I'll make him sweat, though, before I ask him. Imagine, an almost empty head. My God, thousands of us can cram into it."

"Well, now don't get carried away," the small idea said nervously. "Let's aim for quality, not quantity. After all, we want to help lost paradox here find his creator."

"Don't worry," the great idea said, as he bustled off, "Quality and quantity it is, with sufficient diversification to break the monotony."

"Space," the great idea said later, stretching out comfortably. "I haven't seen such space in certuries. You didn't exaggerate," he said turning fondly to the small idea, "not a thing from ear to ear."

"Well, he certainly wasn't my creator," the lost paradox said, wandering around nervously.

"But he is a nice guy, isn't he?" the small idea asked eagerly. He felt ill at ease among the crowd of bustling theories, guesses, intuitions, jokes, puns, and all the rest of the diversified crowd that had been brought along by the great idea.

"A very sympathetic character," an ethical proverb said approvingly.

Raymond Higgins Bottomely smiled vaguely at Smathers, his valet, as he slipped his arms into the jacket that Smathers had picked for him to wear on this very important occasion. Uncle Alfred Bottomely had called a meeting of the Bottomely clan for ten o'clock, a com-

pletely uncivilized hour, probably to decide to whom he would turn over control of the Bottomely interests. Really, Raymond thought, as he buttoned the jacket, he didn't feel quite up to it this morning. His head was buzzing strangely, as though he had a hangover minus the headache. Unaccustomed flashes of upsetting thought disturbed the even tenor of his usually pleasant, vegetable reactions to the movement of life around him.

Pulling the sport jacket straight, he looked at it in the mirror. Red checks with brown stripes. He looked well in it. Medium tall, slim, broad shouldered, with a face consisting of entirely average features put carefully together in a way designed to avoid attracting attention yet achieve a pleasant effect. His brown-blonde hair was combed neatly in a conventional part.

He frowned a bit at his image in the mirror. Were red checks exactly the thing to wear to a business meeting? Uncle Alfred had always been a little on the conservative side. Then the frown disappeared. Smathers had picked it out, and Smathers knew all about those things. Probably what all the captains of finance and industrial tycoons were wearing to business meetings this year.

Smathers, tall, lean, saturnine, stared patiently at his young master's back without a qualm of his well insulated conscience. He was fond of Raymond, he had never had an easier post, or a more considerate master; but fond as he was of the young man, he was fonder of money. And when cousin George Bottomely had casually fluttered a $1,000 check in his vicinity, he had met temptation more than half way by offering to do his part to send Raymond Higgins Bottomely to Uncle Alfred Bottomely dressed in a manner calculated to convince that old man once and for all that nephew Raymond was a complete jackass.

Which, of course, was not too far off the mark. He was, Smathers rationalized, only allowing the truth to out.

Even at that, Smathers did not really believe that he was doing the young man any harm. He did not think that Raymond had any more chance at the Bottomely millions than he, Smathers, had. Cousins George and Harold were two tough birds, and Smathers strongly suspected that a checked suit was only one of a number of steps that they would take to keep Raymond Bottomely and some millions of dollars well apart.

"Well," Raymond said, turning from the mirror reluctantly, "I'm off to the races."

"Yes sir, good luck sir," Smathers said, gliding to the door.

"Thank you, Smathers," Raymond said. That buzzing in his head still bothered him and he felt in no hurry to leave. "Really, I feel that this suit is just thing. Don't know what I'd do without you, Smathers, really I don't."

"I try my best, sir," Smathers said, opening the door, his thin face impassive.

"The road to hell," Raymond said in a strangely clear voice, "Is paved with good intentions."

Smathers' lower jaw dropped abruptly until it was stopped by a protruding corner of his bow tie. "What, what did you mean by that, sir?" he whispered as he fought to regain his composure.

A surprised expression covered Raymond's pleasant face. "Why, I really don't know," he said, bewildered. "It just seemed to come out. Isn't it a saying of some sort, or something?"

"It is, sir," Smathers said, standing stiffly by the door.

"Well, goodbye," Raymond said unhappily. "I have to pick up Uncle's secretary, Sylvia, so I'd better get a move on."

Smathers closed the door very, very slowly after Raymond left.

Raymond maneuvered his convertible into traffic, driving slowly. It was just one of these beautiful, sunny days when it seemed like a crime to hurry anywhere.

People behind him pounded their horns, then came screeching by with distorted faces and bulging eyes leaning out of the windows and screaming unprintable insults at him. It hurt him to see these examples of man's inability to get along with man, and it filled him with a great sadness and a great pity for the human race.

After a while he began to shout back at them. "Quo vadis, quo vadis? He wondered what it meant.

He pulled up in front of the brownstone house in the west seventies where Sylvia lived, and he blew four short blasts on his auto horn.

After a minute she came out of the doorway. The sun caught her auburn hair, and its red highlights sparked in the clear air. She waved to Raymond, and started bouncing down the stairs, a petit, vibrant, bundle of life.

"O, my luve is like the red, red rose," he murmured to himself, "That's newly sprung in June," He stopped abruptly. "Good' heavens," he thought, "I'm in love."

With a worried frown he absentmindedly opened the car door for Sylvia. He barely noticed her as she climbed in beside him. First he had awakened with that buzzing in his head, then he had started spouting things that he didn't even understand, including a poem about a rose that he had never heard before, and now he had found out that he was in love with his Uncle's secretary. An old friend of the family whom he had known for years. It was all too confusing. That's the sort of thing that came from getting up before ten in the morning, he thought moodily.

"Why so serious?" Sylvia asked, her voice soft. "I hope you're not worried about your Uncle's decision?" she continued, her voice fading almost to a whisper.

"My uncle's decision?" Raymond said, looking up in surprise. "No, I wasn't thinking about that."

"Oh, I'm glad," she said, "I," she paused, then went on, "I think he's pretty well decided on your cousin George, and I didn't want you to be disappointed."

"No," Raymond said swinging the car away from the curb, "Why should I be disappointed. Everybody knows that George is much better at that sort of thing than I am. Why he even tells me when to buy and sell securities."

"But aren't you a little worried," Sylvia asked, looking out of the car window, "I've heard it said that George said that he'd cut off your income from the business if he ever got the chance."

Raymond looked at her shocked, "You can't believe everything you hear," he said sternly.

Sylvia looked away, out at the passing scenery.

Raymond pulled the convertible up to the curb beside the towering building that was the heart of Bottomely Enterprises Limited. He snapped off the motor then sat there with a frown on his face.

"Well," Sylvia demanded surprised, aren't you going to get out?"

"Er, yes," Raymond said, "But before we go up, there's something I want to ask you."

Sylvia laughed, "I thought you didn't care about the decision. Go ahead, you can always ask, but remember, as your uncle's private secretary I reserve the right to refuse to give out any information that might be contrary to his interests."

"Oh that," Raymond said, "I wasn't thinking about that. As a matter of fact, I just thought I'd tell you that I love you, and ask you to marry me, or something"

Her face softened, and Raymond caught his breath as he saw how beautiful she looked under her crown of red hair.

"Oh Raymond," she said. "I am sorry. I mean, I think you're the nicest boy," she bit her lip, "the nicest man I've ever known, and I like you awfully much, but, but you're not the type man I

would marry."

Raymond opened the door, climbed out of the car awkwardly, and moved around to open her door. "That's all right," he said, "I just thought I'd mention it, that's all."

"But I'm terribly flattered," she said getting out, "And you're awfully good looking." She stared at him. "Oh Raymond," she suddenly wailed, "if you were only a bit different."

"That's all right," he murmured automatically. He felt sorry, she seemed so upset. "I just thought I'd ask."

"I suppose you'll marry George now," he added reflectively.

"George," she looked surprised, "how did you know that he had asked?"

Raymond shrugged, and taking Sylvia's arm he steered her through the revolving doors into the stainless steel and concrete palace that governed his uncle's empire.

All the way up in the elevator the buzzing in his head grew worse. He began to worry about whether he would have to call on one of these expensive chaps who did something about heads. Psychologists, or psychoanalysts, or psychiatrists. First he would have to find out which of them was good for a buzzing head. Everything was so confusing. It would be so much simpler if they had one kind of chap plainly labelled as a head mechanic.

They entered Alfred Bottomely's great office with the ease bred of familiarity. Uncle Alfred was not behind his tremendous mahogany desk, but George and Harold Bottomely were standing in the center of the thick carpet that covered the floor.

"Well, well," George said, looking up with a sneer as they entered. "If it isn't racey Raymond. That's quite an outfit."

Raymond looked uneasily at their neat pin-striped black suits and shifted uncomfortably. George and Harold looked a lot alike, and yet very different. George was lean, with a long nose and small, beady eyes. His complexion was sallow. Harold, with the same features, was fat. His eyes, like pig's, lay lost deep in the fat of his face. His complexion was as ruddy as his brother's was sallow.

"Smathers said that this suit was all right," Raymond said uncertainly.

Harold laughed. "You must tell Uncle Alfred that you don't know how to dress yourself yet, and blame it all on your valet. He'll like that."

Sylvia interrupted, speaking quickly, "I'd better go and tell him that you're all here." She walked soundlessly across the great office and through the small door that led into the inner office.

"If I were you," George said quickly, "I'd get out of here and change clothes before Uncle Alfred sees you. Otherwise, you'll be a dead duck."

"Do you think so?" Raymond asked nervously, turning to Harold.

"I certainly do, and you'd better hurry," Harold urged.

Raymond turned with sudden decision and started towards the door.

"Stop, you idiot," a commanding voice snapped from behind him. "Do you think I'd give you any consideration at all if you were too stupid to be present at a meeting called to determine your own future."

The old man walked slowly behind his desk. He paused for a moment to regard his nephews, then he sank down into the deep easy chair that served as his throne. He had a head that could have been carved of ivory, so white and translucent was his skin, eroded into deep gullies by flowing time. But his nose was large and hooked, like the beak of an eagle, and his eyes were black, piercing, and clear.

George, Harold, and Raymond sank quietly into deep leather easy chairs and looked at the head behind the desk in silence.

Sylvia sat in a straight chair to the left of the desk, a stenographer's note-

book open and her pencil poised.

Alfred Bottomely tapped his fingers restlessly on the top of his desk and he studied his nephews through old, bright, eyes that had studied too many men for too many years to have any illusions left as to what he saw before him. He wondered if he was wasting his time, if he couldn't have made the decision just as well in privacy.

He let his eyes wander over the young men before him. George Bottomely, a cunning rogue, completely untrustworthy, with a strong will, who would not hesitate to turn on his uncle if he could gain absolute control of the company. Unfortunately, too cunning, too grasping and greedy, to succeed, because he would never know that exact moment when he should stop and compromise.

Harold Bottomely, as cunning and unscrupulous as his brother, with a better sense of how far he could push a man, but without his brother's drive. A weak man given to allowing emotion rather than reason to dictate his decisions.

And finally Raymond. A nice boy. Loyal, trustworthy, and an utter nincompoop.

And from these three he had to choose one to carry on the Bottomely Company.

His eyes fell on his secretary, Really, of all those assembled in the room she was the most competent. She knew the business backwards and forwards. She had drive, energy, and common sense. But she was a woman, and she was not a Bottomely.

He glanced at the three young men before him. To give it to all three would not work, because in the resulting struggle George would inevitably win. If he was going to give it to George, he might as well do it directly now.

But first to go through the motions of the interview.

"Raymond," his still vital voice snapped, "why did you come here in that ridiculous outfit?"

Raymond opened his mouth to mutter something about Smathers and was surprised to hear himself say, "A wolf in sheeps clothing."

A ghost of a smile passed over the face of the old man. "You mean," he asked softly, "that you have been disguising your wolfish characteristics all these years by acting as a rather foolish sheep?"

"Bear would be better," Harold interupted with a nasty laugh, "It might interest you to know, uncle Alfred, that cousin Raymond has been unloading the company's stock as fast as he could these past few weeks."

The old man's eyes widened imperceptibly in surprise, "Has anyone else been selling?" he demanded in a hard voice.

"I certainly haven't," Harold said, a prim smile on his fat face.

George shook his head no with vehemence, a confident sneer on his lean face.

"Well," the old man said, shifting his eyes to Raymond, "Why?"

Raymond squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. In a vague way he began to suspect that he was being framed. He opened his mouth to explain that he bought and sold his interests as George advised, and that he actually didn't know what he had been selling, even though he knew how uncle Alfred would react to that news of his incompetence, but somehow nothing came out of his open mouth. He gulped, his throat felt dry, and he opened his lips to try again.

"After us, the deluge," he heard himself say.

Uncle Alfred frowned. "Your practice of answering in old saws, while it undoubtedly saves words, could become boring in time." He paused and thought for a moment. "Yes," he continued, nodding his head, "I must confess that I think you're absolutely right. There's

no doubt that the value of Bottomely Enterprises will drop sharply when my retirement is announced publicly. You should be able to buy them back at a handsome profit."

He stared in puzzlement at his surprising nephew. A wolf in sheeps clothing? Well maybe. If so, it had been a clever move. One that probably had thrown George off the track long ago.

"Did you sell on your own," Alfred Bottomely demanded, "or did someone advise you?"

"As a matter of fact, uncle," George interrupted before Raymond could answer, nervously twisting his thin fingers together, "I advised him to sell."

Alfred Bottomely ignored him and his eyes continued to bore into Raymonds questioningly.

Raymond opened his mouth nervously, "Well er, autant d'hommes, autant d'avis."

"My God," George screeched, "speak English."

Alfred silenced him with a look.

"The point," the old man said, "is well taken. There are as many opinions as there are men. Advise does not matter, action does. You sold, and George who advised you didn't."

"Look here," George said standing up, his normally sallow face red with rage, "I've listened to enough of my idiot cousin's nonsense. He's just pulling your leg, uncle. He's talking nonsense and you're falling for it. Give him a straight yes or no question about the business and see how much he knows."

"French," George snorted as he sat down, "Why he can't even speak pig latin."

The old man listened to the tirade, without moving. He would go along with George, but he hoped that he was wrong. He was surprised by his nephew Raymond, and it had been many years since a human being had been able to surprise him.

"All right," the old man said abruptly. "Here is a problem that actually arose recently and that lies close to the heart of the matter. A shipload of vegetable oil destined for Mexico has been refused by the consignee as his agents have discovered that it is just beginning to turn rancid. The ship is in Panama. The day is in January. Now there are three other customers expecting shipment of that quantity of oil: One is in Bombay, one in Sweden, one in Argentina. To whom and when should the ship be sent."

Raymond's jaw fell open. Vegetable oil, so they handled that too.

"Go ahead, brain trust," George sneered. There was a confident smile on his thin face, and he sat with his hands folded comfortably across his stomach.

"Damn," Raymond thought, "he knows the answer."

He saw Sylvia's eyes on him. He almost thought he saw tears glistening in them, but it might have been the light.

"Wait," he said desperately, "why should I have to answer first. Let George try and see if he knows the answer." The old man shook his head irritably. "Answer, answer," he said. "You'll all have a chance at it."

Raymond glanced desperately around at their faces, searching for a clue. Those were tears in Sylvia's eyes, he noted absently. Well, there was nothing to do but jump. One chance out of three. "I'd send it to Bombay," he started, and he caught the quickly repressed look of triumph that flickered across George's face.

"At the Greek Calends," he heard himself finish. There it was again. He was saying things that he didn't understand, and the buzzing in his head was worse.

"Ad Kalendas Graecas," the old man echoed softly, but his expression was inscrutable.

George was on his feet. "Clever," he sneered, "Clever to give the date in

Latin to throw us off, but it won't help because you have the wrong place. I'd send it to Sweden, and immediately."

"Why?" the old man asked.

"Because," George said triumphantly, "It's winter in the northern hemisphere, and I'd get it into a cold climate as soon as possible to stop further spoilage."

"And you?" Alfred Bottomely demanded turning his black eyes on to Harold.

The fat man pursed his lips. "The same as George," he finally said. "Certainly never to Bombay."

Alfred Bottomely stood up warily. He turned to Raymond.

"I'm sorry," he began . . . .

"Oh, that's all right," Raymond muttered, standing up also. "Don't feel bad about it, I don't . . ."

"I'm sorry," the old man began again in a firm tone, interrupting Raymond, "to have to place the direction of Bottomely Enterprises on your hitherto carefree shoulders as of tomorrow."

"What?" George screeched wildly, leaping to his feet. "Why you're insane. That shipment would never reach Bombay before it became so rancid that it would have to be dumped. What do you mean?" he raved, "He can't be right."

The old man barely batted an eyelash.

"Shall I explain, or do you want to?" he asked Raymond calmly.

"Please do, uncle," Raymond said, feeling badly in need of an explanation himself.

"As any educated person knows," the old man said stiffly, "There were no calends in the Greek calendar. Hence the Latin expression 'At the Greek Calends', meaning 'never'." Which is, of course, the correct answer. Bottomely Enterprises never would deliberately try and palm off oil that could even be suspected of being rancid on a customer. As a matter of fact, the oil was sold for what it was right there in Panama. I must say that the way in which Raymond was able to give the correct answer to me without letting either of you two know was a revelation to me. The lad is indeed a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"By the way, Raymond," the old man continued, "after tomorrow I won't interfere in your business, but today, while I'm still President, may I advise you to speak to Miss Sylvia Robbins about staying in your employ. She knows the business as well as I do and will be a tremendous help."

"I'll," Raymond said, licking his lips nervously, "I'll speak to her."

He started to walk towards Sylvia, and he realized that she had stood up and was looking up at him with a strange, half frightened look on her face. He was dimly aware that Uncle Alfred had left, closely followed by two vociferous nephews.

"You were wonderful," she whispered.

He heard his own voice start again, softly, saying

"Who is Sylvia? What is she, That all our swains commend her?"

There were other words, all nice, that she seemed to like, so he didn't try to stop their flow.

"Very pretty, very pretty," the lost paradox said bitterly, "but I'm still anon."

"Oh stop complaining," a trite expression snapped. "It's nice to have a place where we can come to when we're tired of waiting in the world of ideas to be called. I'm going back now, but I'll be visiting again."

"What worries me," the little idea who started it all said nervously, "is what will happen when she discovers that while he's a swell guy, his grey matter isn't as profuse as she might now expect."

"Maybe she won't notice it," the trite expression volunteered hopefully.

"Love is blind," said an old saying.

THE END

personals

Tarzan comic strips, very early issues, for sale. Burroughs in mags and books wanted. P. Ogden, 31 Malvern Ave., Toronto 13, Ontario, Canada . . . *George W. Fields: I have misplaced your address. Please send it to me. Jim Winters,* 3316 *S. Handley, Wichita* 16, *Kans.* . . Wanted: Mint or near-mint issue of Mad No. 5. Anthony Zampetti, 253 Snyder St., Orange, N. J. *Send 2c stamp for list of stf and fantasy books, mags, and comics. Am in the market for a few choice items. Don "Red" McGinnis,* 123 *W. 5th St., Dayton, Ohio.* . .For sale or trade: SF PBs, mags and hardcovers 50-55. Send stamped, self-addressed envelopes for list. Michael Sullivan, 17 Woodland Ave., Winsted, Conn . . .2000 *mags, scattered PBs and hardcover books to sell. All mags, all dates:* 7c *each. Additional* 5c *postage for every three mags. Reductions made on orders of* $2.50 *or more. Send list of wants and I will return-mail you as to availability. Paul J. Robbins,* 8570 *Whiteworth, Los Angeles* 35, *Calif* . . . Wanted: Jack Woodford's "Plotting—How To Have A Brainchild." Query first. Bob Harker, 191 San Juan Drive Hollister, Calif. . . . *Wanted: Photos for "The Science Fiction Yearbook" of conventions and other fan doings around the nation. Contact 20th Century Fandom now!* 471 *S. Frazier Ave., Los Angeles* 22, *Calif. Photos or negatives accepted* . . . I have over 300 stf and fantasy mags for sale at 25c each, post-paid. All are in excellent condition. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope for list. Helen Hirst, Twin Firs Handcraft, 7814 N. E. Highway 99, Vancouver, Wash . . . *Need any aSF's before* 1948. *Will trade the following hardcover books for them: PUPPET MASTERS, Heinlein; *OMNIBUS OF SF, Conklin; BEST OF SF, Conklin;* ZOTZ, *Karig; *LIGHTS IN THE SKY ARE STARS, Brown. Would like five ishs for starred titles (they are book club selections) and ten ishes for the rest. Contact Jim Winters.* 3316 *S. Handley. Wichita* 16, *Kans* . . . Wanted: Jan. 1941 AS, Winter '41 FA Quarterly, and June '40 Thrilling Adventures, which contain Tarzan stories. Also want other mags with E. R. Burroughs stories. Send list and prices. Gordon Johnson, P. O. Box 274, Norphlet, Ark . . . *Wanted: CONAN THE BARBARIAN and E. E. Smith first editions. Am selling duplicates from my collection, including many rare books by Burroughs, Merritt, Kline, Mundy, Chambers, etc. Mel Stein,* 4616 *N. St. Louis, Chicago* 25, *Ill* . . . Wanted: any F&SF, preferably the earlier ones; any Weird Science, Weird Fantasy, Vault of Horror, Tales From The Crypt, Haunt of Fear; Galaxy's containing "Baby is Three" and "Saucer of Loneliness" by Ted Sturgeon; TWS with "Wanderer's Return" and any stf mags with Bradbury stories; Esquires with "Vital Factor" by Nelson Bond, "The Illustrated Man" by Bradbury, "Miss Medford's Moon" by Martin Gardner; SatEvePost with stories by Heinlein; any E. C. Annual with stories from Weird Science or Weird Fantasy, any WS or WF with stories by Bradbury; source of John Collier's "Demortuis" and crime suspenstories. Send price lists. Bob Guyot, Box 255, R. D. No. 1, Ravena, N. Y. . . *I have aSF since* 1944, *complete Galaxy, dozens of other mags and over* 100 *hardcover books (stf) for sale reason-*

(*Continued on page* 92)

THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

THE mailman was late that day, and to a person whose day begins with the mail that can be very annoying. Apartment 308 is in a fairly large building. The regular mailman arrives at about eleven o'clock, but he seems to have four days off a week, a two week vacation every month, and in addition he seems to have pneumonia every other month, and his grandmother's funeral seems to coincide with every Sox baseball game. The substitute mailmen (there's a different one every day the "regular" man is off) have an I. Q. of 3.47, fifty-fifty vision, a psychosis against being a mailman, and a natural aptitude for getting mail in the wrong boxes. This day, however, it turned out to be the regular mailman. The delivery to the distribution boxes had been late.

I helped him distribute the mail in the fifty boxes of the apartment house, which is against Postal Regulations, so please keep it secret. And there was only one letter for me. It was from someone I didn't know, who had a Chicago address. That in itself wasn't unusual. A good percentage of my mail is from people who are writing to me for the first time. On the way upstairs to my apartment I ripped the envelope open and took out the folded sheet of paper. Tucked within the folds was a crisp new five dollar bill, and there was no writing of any kind on the sheet of paper.

Curious, I looked up the name in the phone book. It was there, with the same address typed on the envelope. I toyed with the idea of calling the guy and asking him what it was about. But five dollars! — I decided to play a waiting game.

The next day the mailman was early. In my mailbox were several letters and a couple of fanzines. One of the envelopes had a Chicago return address with a name unfamiliar to me — but not the same name that had sent me a five dollar bill. But, suddenly eager, I ripped the envelope open. Inside was the blank sheet of typewriter paper with a crisp new five dollar bill folded into it. This time the name wan't in the phone book.

Well, it doesn't take too much of that sort of thing to spoil me. The next day I was waiting for the mailman an hour before he was due to show up, and he was an hour late, and a substitute.

Lot's of mail for me, but — not *the* letter. The next day it was the same thing — no letter with a fin in it. Despondent? Did you ever have a steady income over fifteen hundred dollars a year suddenly cut off like that without notice? Of course I was despondent! My plans to get new tires for the car, a new suit, and maybe a much needed vacation later on — poof! Evaporated just like that!

During the following months I gradually recovered. The time came when, quite often, I even forgot to look for envelopes with five dollar bills in them. Then came the night that Ted and Judy Dikty threw a party for Bob (Tick tock) Tucker and his wife Fern. (That nickname for Bob goes back to a skit put on by the Hydra Club in New York some years ago, concerning a man with a tick in his neck that jerked his head every few seconds, who went to a dianetics auditor to get rid of it. He

became almost a clear. He almost got rid of the tick, but not quite. Finally the auditor got an inspiration. He converted the tick into a tock and then sent the patient to Bloomington where it was tucked away by the great Tock Tucker.)

Anyway, it was a wonderful party, Judy was her usual radiant self, Ted was busy making sure everyone kept a full glass, Frank Robinson had Bob Tucker cornered on the other side of the room in some serious discussion, and I had Fern cornered next to the piano, trying to convince her she was too beautiful for the likes of a sad hack like Tucker. Around us the murmur of conversation and laughter rose and fell like the foamy wash of the incoming tide in a rocky cove, when suddenly in a moment of silence the bomb dropped. It was Ted Dikty's voice.

"Get any five dollar bills in the mail lately, Rog?" it asked. It was followed by a nastily grating laugh.

"What!" Frank Robinson shouted. "Don't tell me you got some *too!*"

"What I get in the mail is *my* business," I said cautiously.

"Uh — Don't tell me you've been getting five dollar bills in the mail? How many of them did you get?"

"Three of them," Frank said.

"*Three* of them!" I exploded. "There's something crooked going on here. I was shorted one."

"Oh, so you only got two of them," Frank said smugly.

I turned to Ted and demanded an explanation. Not much of a one was forthcoming. It seems that some wealthy stf fan with a distorted sense of humor sent out about fifty of them to various people as a gag. Ted refused to divulge the name of the obnoxious practical joker.

"Let him *try* to get them back," I sneered. I meant it, too. Ten bucks was very small payment for what I had gone through on account of them. "A wealthy science fiction fan!" Ha! But suddenly I knew no other explanation would make sense. Who else but a fan would think up such a dastardly hoax? Diabolical.

Such things must stop! It is up to fandom to get rid of these hoaxsters. Let's have no more of these hoaxes, if I get any more five dollar bills in the mail I'll — Well, I'll —

I think I have some fanzines to review.

DESTINY: 25c; Earl Kemp, 3508 N. Sheffield, Chicago, Ill., who is the father of my godson Terry who is only a few months old right now. I'm waiting impatiently until he grows old enough so that I can scream at him, "My god — son!"

This is a photo offset fanzine. I haven't seen the whole issue yet, but two weeks ago I saw some of the made up copy that is photographed onto photo masters and it's going to be a very good issue. Lin Carter has some of his best poems in this issue, preceded by an introduction of Lin by no less than Rog Phillips. Also in this issue (it can be told because he will have found out before he reads this) is something Sidney Coleman submitted to Earl, which Earl "rejected" and then conveniently "lost", much to Sidney's annoyance. There's a short story by Roberta Collins, too.

Earl Kemp's recent issue of Destiny with his Science Fiction Index of 1954 is being included in Ted Dikty's "Best of 1955" book, so those of you who subscribe to Destiny are getting one of the best if not the best fanzine being published at the present time. Every issue is tops. You newcomers are in for a real treat if you send for a copy.

INSIDE: (and Science Fiction Advertiser); 25c; Ron Smith, 611 W. 114th St., Apt. 3D-310, New York 25, N. Y., next door to Harlan Ellison. Cindy Smith is art editor. I think she slipped her gears this issue with Ralph Rayburn Phillips' gruesome monstrosities in green and black in a supposed interpretation of "Lovecraft Isms." Ads are down to almost nothing — about two pages out of forty-six — which brings them only about twelve bucks for advertising, and

it costs about four hundred dollars to publish this photo-offset magazine, so they will have to sell over fifteen hundred copies to break even. Your quarter will help, and you'll get your money's worth.

"But I Never Learned How" continues Ron's discussion of writing, live characters, child delinquency, and other subjects. He holds your interest. Howard Browne, editor of Amazing Stories, in "So What's a Little Blood?" discusses the problems of being an editor. Joe Gibson, in "Ray Palmer's Medicine Show," has a highly entertaining discussion of Ray's editorial policies and the policies of other editors in the field, with no compliments to any of them. There's a quite comprehensive book review section — always the strong feature of INSIDE. Also the Hamling-Bott versus Isaac Asimov controversy over unfavorable book reviews continues, with Algis Budry's spending six pages discussing his views on that and other subjects; and I find myself agreeing with him on most points.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; Fandom House, P. O. Box 2331, Patterson 23, New Jersey. James V. Taurasi, Sr., and Ray Van Houten, editors. The newspaper of science fiction, fan and pro. Forry Ackerman has perhaps the most informative column in this newspaper on what sales have been made to what markets, so that you know what to look forward to within the next year. He announces that "Ray Bradbury is infanticipating a new daughter."

The mid-July issue carries the news that Larry Shaw is editor of a new science fiction magazine which will appear in September. Larry says this about the name of it: "While it's a real natural, it has never been used in the past, and that includes minor variations of the same word." It has me guessing. Cosmos? Interstellar? Anyway, good luck, Larry.

On page three is the huge headline, "X SCIENCE FICTION" DELAYED AGAIN. Possibly because its editor, Jim Harmon, was too busy writing me letters. But Mr. Harmon states to F-T, "What's late with *X science Fiction?* Obviously: everything." There is also a discussion of "Criswell Predicts," a feature of Harmon's *Spaceway* prozine. Ken Curtis says that Criswell stinks. Okay, Ken, I'll emulate that prophet and go him one better. I predict!—that if Criswell keeps on predicting he will predict something that comes true!

CALIFAN: 15c; David Rike, Box 203, Rodea, California. Issue No. 4, and this boy has the talent it takes to make a fanzine that isn't just another one. He reminds me of Don Wilson and his fanzine *Dream Quest,* from Banning, California, years ago. And attached to it as a suplement is volume 1, number 1 of Fandom Dispatch, a fannish newszine aping Fantasy-Time in style, but seriously covering a great deal of news of doings in fandom. This could fill a great need. For example, it reports that Terry Carr's fanzine, *Stfmag,* will henceforth be staffwritten by a stable of writers commissioned expressly for that purpose, Ted White, editor of *Stellar,* plans to circulate a questionaire through FAPA and general fandom concerning fans' favorites in typers, dupulicators, duplicating equipment, and the prices he paid. There are dozens of such items. There's also a cartoon of a very potted looking fan sitting in front of a tripe writer beside which are two whiskey bottles, one tipped over and empty. The caption is, "Duh, boy am I potted! Guess I'll write a letter to Rog Phillips, and, when he prints it, deny it all and claim that it's the blatherings of an idiot (which it will be)." Could I have the orignal of that, Dave? Or was it drawn on stencil?

ALPHA: Jan Jansen, 229 Berchemiel, Borgerhout, Belgium. This is an all continental issue, No. 10. "They Are Already Here" is a nice little story about aliens, discovered in a routine t. b. X ray checkup at a school. "Twerpcon"

by Maurice Delplane is the story of a genuine Martian who lands on Earth, not knowing he is at the time and place of a science fiction convention. The illo for this story is even better than the story itself, and it's terrific. "Ici, Loupe en Mains, on Disseque," par Jacques Pierroux — c'est un grond storees, mes non? Not to mention de schoonste naam op 't wereldroned, or something.

By the way, you can get this issue by sending 60c to Dick Ellington, 113 W. 84th St. Apt. 51E, New York 24, N. Y. Lend Lease, you know. In fact, you can get almost anything in the way of fanzines by sending to Dick for it, Joe Gibson informs me. Dick is the N. Y. clearing house for everything.

SLANDER: 10c; Jan Sadler, 219 Broadmoor Dr., Jackson 6, Miss. A very nice dittoed zine. There's a report on the Atlantic Affair (the Agacon) by Russ Watkins, from which can be gleaned the information that Jan Sadler is fifteen years old, a girl, the daughter of a wealthy stf fan named David Sadler, and that she and her dad attended the Agacon. Doc Barrett, who was to have been MC, could not come, Russ says, because he sprained his ankle while riding a pogo stick. In spite of that the affair was a huge success. Charles Wells has a shorter and less comprehensive report of the Agacon, and Fred Chappell has another. If Jan can get three people to write her an article that fast she will have no trouble getting material for many more issues.

"Letter From Home" by Michael Chandler, is only one page long, but it alone is worth twice the price of this fanzine, I wish I could reprint it here, but then you might not send for Jan's fanzine. It's a letter from a G. I. on Mars to his folks. I'll quote just one short bit. "The saergent was a kind of fumbelfangers. He was showing us some kind of a gun and he was showing us what not to do and he did it and all of a sudden the saergent wasn't there any more." The whole thing is a classic.

ECLIPSE: 10c; Ray Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Nebraska. A bimonthly, mimeographed on white paper. Some good illustrations. "The Rescue of July the Seventh" by Linda Perry, is a well written story which blends time travel, fandom, and a few dozen other things into a well packed action story where Superfan tries to save Mr. Science Fiction with the aid of Mrs. Stf and a fan named Qzrl, from the Charax Science Fantasy League. In one action packed scene Superfan and Mrs. Stf perform a prefrontal lobotomy with a razor blade and a nail file on a night-watchman in the Colorado Springs post-office so that he won't remember having seen them when he wakes up. The fanzine review department of Eclipse is longer and somewhat better than mine in the CLUB HOUSE.

W. F. Link tells his experiences at the Fanvet Convention in New York last April. He and Franchi arrived in the middle of a Sam Moscowitz speech. He says, "For the first hour there was nothing to do but listen to Sam on such subjects as how Tony Boucher posesses the great power of wrecking any stf book merely by panning it in all his various affiliations as well as his own F&SF. Sam ran down in time to be replaced by the bearded Ted Sturgeon . . ." However, Link alternated between the generously distributed bars in Werderman Hall and the speechmakers, gradually getting fuzzy around the edges. At one time he ran into Harlan Ellison who told him he despised white bucks, the shoes Link was wearing, and tried to step on them. They had a beer together and wandered back into the hall to hear J. W. Campbell Jr. speak. Altogether a very enjoyable fanzine.

THE GOTHIC HORROR: no price listed; George Wetzel, 5 Playfield St., Dundalk 22, Md. I don't know just what to say about this. It isn't a fanzine, but a collection of stories by Wet-

zel. Although the mimeo job he does on the fanzine "Undertakings" is one of the best I've seen, the mimeo job on the copy of this collection of stories which I received is ruined by thin paper which lets the ink through so that both sides are often impossible to read. There are six stories by the author. Four of them have appeared previously in Fanfare, Renaissance, and Fantasias. I don't have the time at present to read these stories so that I could comment on them intelligently. In glancing here and there through the twenty-one pages, they seem to be somewhat of the Weird Story type.

UNDERTAKINGS: 15c; Sam Johnson, 1517 Penny Dr., Edgewood, Elizabeth City, N. C., mimeographed in blue ink on what seems to be gray paper, though the paper has blue and green tints to it. Some of the artwork is the most detailed I've ever seen on stencil. "The Gothic Horror," by George Wetzel, which is in the collection of his stores mentioned just a moment ago, also appears here, but with changes in wording here and there, and with enough good artwork to enhance readability. (Possibly my slightly unfavorable attitude toward Wetzel's collection of his own stories is a prejudice against a writer publishing his own works—I dunno.) In Undertakings it looks good.

In "Yesterday" H. Maxwell dissects Philip Wylie, after saying, "If I am to keep this thing within reasonable word limits I must cut corners and occasonally make an arbitrary statement, relatively unsupported. The cognoscenti will kindly not infer from this, however, that I could not, given sufficient space, back up every arbitrary point." That's a very good "out." I must remember it and use it myself sometime. The article itself is exceptionally good. The kind of thing you read slowly and get a lot out of. For example, "It is reasonably sure that whatever action men and governments take, their course will be determined mainly by their emotions and their environmental pressures."

Fifty-two pages in this 1955 annish, with hours and hours of good reading. Also a few poems.

HARK 4: 10c; Randy Brown, 6619 Anita St., Dallas 14, Texas. Every page shows that Randy has a lot of fun publishing his fanzine. Three different colors of paper make up the sixteen pages of mimeography. A fair distribution of stencil artwork. Noah McLeod, Jan Sadler. and Ron Ellik author the contents except for the letter department. Jan Sadler has a letter which tells Randy, among others things, commenting on a previous issue of HARK, "the editorial is so mature it drools with dignity." Wish I could think of things like that to say.

These teen age fans are giving me an inferiority complex. It used to be that one of my hobbies was sticking my neck out and letting people blunt their swords on it. Just a couple of weeks ago, however, I got the neatest beheading in history not excluding those by guillotine during the French Revolution—and by a teenager whose name I won't mention just to keep him from getting some kind of award at the Cleveland convention for it. I got a letter from him. I sent him an answer . . . (Just a moment while I don my Paul Coates disguise to renact the thing.)

Mr. Rog Phillips
c/o Other Worlds
P. O. Box 56, Station V
Cincinnati 10, Ohio.

Dear Sir:

My English teacher almost failed me this year when she found out I read S. F. How could I persuade a person who has read only one story (and a bad one at that) that S. F. is a healthy subject?

Sincerely yours,
Name withheld

If you hope to persuade your teacher, the best way to do it is to become a brilliant student in English.

Get on the ball, kid, and be a credit to science fiction instead of a liability. Science fiction fans, on the average, have a little extra I. Q., and use it. — Rog.

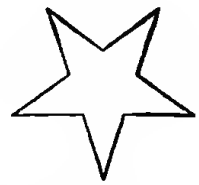
And what kind of an answer did I get back? This teen age fan apologized for having expressed himself so badly. Being a member of the National Honorary Society and a few other things, he automatically thinks of B plus as almost a failing grade (which is quite natural under those conditions), and that is what he got this once in English, and it worries him.

Oh, well.

And compare, for example, the way I reviewed INSIDE, Ron Smith's fanzine, with Ron Ellik's review of it in HARK. "40 pp. this issue, most everyone of interest to anybody. HERE is a mag with format-plus! neatly arranged, intelligently illustrated, and marvelously typed. Of course, it's photo-offset. But comparing this kind of photo offsetting with the most excellent example of mimeography around (take GRUE, for example) we find that Ron puts much more work into his format, not letting his means of repro do its own work but sweating every inch of the way. It's obvious that Ron has MONEY in this zine—he pays for material, especially for good artwork. And he doesn't cramp his material into small spaces as Walt Willis said "Blank space is easy to publish", Walt didn't mention that's also expensive, and shows that the editor wants his zine to be asthetically as well as literarily pleasing."

Probably if I could do that good a job of picturing INSIDE for you, Ron Smith would be snowed under the subscriptions. When the CLUB HOUSE was in *Amazing Stories* I tried an experiment of getting fanzine editors to write their own reviews for me. It didn't bring results because most fanzine editors couldn't bring themselves to praise their own work in print, and I don't blame them.

Anyway, to get back to HARK, Randy is doing a nice job on his zine. Also there's a nice little group of active fans in Dallas, so if you live there and don't know them, get in touch with Randy.



PERSONALS

(*Continued from page* 86)

ably. Send me your want list or send stamped, self-addressed envelope for my complete list. George Semples, 401 Keyser Bldg., Baltimore 2, Md . . . Am publishing a magazine, CATHARSIS, and am in dire need of material. Lest future issues be blank boring banalities, please send poetry, artwork, articles, stories, pep-talks to Martin Jukovsky, 50-06 31st Avenue, Woodside 77, N. Y. Oh, yes— subscriptions would help, too. 15c an issue, 80c for six issues. In addition, I would like to obtain any copies of the SILLY MILLY comic strips. Also want back issues of PEON, SF BULLETIN, DIMENSIONS, SF COMMENTATOR, RHODO DIGEST, QUANDRY, GRUE, VEGA, SKHK, SPACESHIP, SF NEWSLETTER. OOPSLA! OPUS, SF, anytape-recorder fanzines anything pertaining to Degler, and photos from the Cleveland '55 convention . . . *Play chess by mail. For complete information regarding membership in Postal Chess Mates, write Joseph R. Rhoden, 622 W. Buckingham Place, Chicago 13, Illinois* . . . Send for a sCINTIllation, a fanzine put out by Mark Schulzinger, 6791 Meadow Ridge Lane, Amberly Village, Ohio. 10c per copy.

THE END

LETTERS

(Note by Rap: Although the following isn't a letter, and doesn't really belong in the letters section, we think it ought to go in somewhere, and this is as good a place as any. Actually it is an article by Joe Gibson, published in a fan magazine called INSIDE & SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER. We reproduce it as it appears in that magazine, and we append our reply for what it is worth.)

RAY PALMER'S MEDICINE SHOW

By Joe Gibson

THERE'S a legend kicking around out somewhere in my country, which is the wild and wooly West about the character who rambled around in an old wagon with "MeddiCin Show" burnt on the tailboard by a hot running iron. He had a little she-jackass that could dance to a jews-harp (when she was a mind to) and he peddled a cure-all remedy that was guaranteed to take the warts off a toad or foal a dry mare, among other things. The thing was, this feller actually believed his remedy did some good because it sold well—and it did, too, but not for that reason. Thing was, this feller was from back East someplace and was kind of ignorant. So some feed merchant sold him some stuff to mix in his remedy because it "pepped up" animals. So this feller's remedy had a pinch or two of Spanish Fly mixed in with the thin molasses, red pepper and beet juice. It "pepped up" humans pretty well, too. And everybody knew it but this medicine-show feller. Was a regular side-splitter every time he got up to start selling the stuff. The womenfolk finally got wind of what was goin' on, tho, and some of the boys had to hustle the "doc" out of the country on a fast bronc one night to save him from a female lynching party.

Ray Palmer hasn't been lynched yet, but I've been laughing at him for years. Certainly, his *Amazing* sold. It topped the circulation of all the other s. f. prozines for several years before Ray ever met Dick Shaver. But the reason for *Amazing's* popularity during that period was never what Palmer thought it was—or anyway, what he *says* it was. Ray Palmer's instinct sold *Amazing;* his personality or ingenuity had nothing to do with it.

I discovered this when *Thrilling Wonder* & *Startling* were enjoying the top circulation in the field. (Somebody like H. L. Gold may be wondering how I ever knew any circulation figures, which are such closely guarded "secrets" that virtually everybody on New York's magazine row knows about 'em.) I figured if TWS & SS had some ingredient that made them sell well, it must be something you couldn't find in other prozines which *didn't* sell well. So I spread a whole mess of 'zines on the floor and studied 'em. You can find it, yourself, the same way—and you needn't look further than the covers. And what TWS & SS had then, *Amazing* had under Palmer—and *Astounding* and *Galaxy* have some of it now, tho their circulation is only about two-thirds of what TWS once had. Sam Merwin's ingenuity didn't sell TWS, either. He must have stumbled onto the keynote purely by instinct. Campbell still doesn't know what it is or he'd never have stopped using it, not even for a single issue.

Once you see a prozine on the newsstands, its appearance will determine whether you buy it or not. The outer

appearance of a s. f. 'zine must satisfy the interests of a s. f. readership. And it can't be faked—it will always typify the nature of the 'zine's contents, somehow.

But Ray Palmer has always seemed to me to be the kind of guy you could never tell anything—unless it happened to agree with what he'd already decided for himself. He has decided that physical science fiction is dead; esper science fiction is the coming thing. Ray calls it imagination when, of course, he's actually confining imagination to one specific field.

He prefers to blame the downfall of the science fiction "boom" on scarcity of material, on editors crying for stories and writers digging out old turkeys that could never sell anywhere before. He prefers to neglect the fact that some of those "turkeys" proved to be better stories than the socio-pathological crap editors were demanding and giving top credit during that "boom" period. In doing so he fails to realize that science fiction was forced into one specific "party line" by such editorial demands; that the science in s. f. became a stereotyped Campbellian orthodoxy; and that space operas had better characterization. Their cardboard characters were at least real cardboard. So, in specifying a psionic kick for *Other Worlds*, Palmer is merely a Johnny-Come-Lately pulling the same "party line" trick other editors have already tried.

But you can bet Ray's approach to parapsychology won't be any mere excuse to splash around in beautifully complicated wheels-within-wheels plots, such as van Vogt milked so thoroughly dry in his "Null-A" series. Palmer is a man of direct action. He'll go slam-bang into it with all the colorful trimmings of mystic articles in the Sunday supplements. And it will sell if he doesn't go nuts with it. It will sell if he gives it the same play he gave the Shaver Mystery in *Amazing*. However, he hasn't been giving that kind of play to the contents of *Universe/Other Worlds* and it may well be that he's forgotten how. It won't sell if he goes in for mystic symbology or some half-draped broad tippy-toeing on hot coals and whatnot for cover illos—and magazine contents of the same nature. That is, it won't outsell *Astounding* or *Galaxy*, tho it may do better than Hamling's *Imagination*.

He's almost certain to give it the "mystic" treatment to the hilt—a trait he has which occasionally brought forth some pretty weird "science" in the old *Amazing*—and Palmer's psi research will be like nothing you ever get out of Duke University. Madame Blavatsky should "ghost" write the lead novels, maybe. You won't find "black magic" mentioned as it was several thousand years ago, when it was neither "black" nor "magic" but the religious core of those early civilizations. I remember quite a few discussions back in the prehistoric days of prewar fandom about those walled merchants cities that gave birth to the Eurasian caravan routes long before nations were begun, or empires, and religious teaching hadn't yet turned to fakery. There's far more archaeological evidence to go on now—and slow recognition of the fact that those old priests and philosophers learned a lot, but never developed any means of teaching it to the people that would work. We're just beginning to develop some good, workable methods now. We're just beginning to call it psychosomatic medicine and whatnot instead of black magic or voodoo. But when Palmer thinks of fancy terms for it, it will still come out voodoo, if we're to judge from his actions in the past.

It can't be any worse than Gold's socio-pathological kick or Campbell's semantics kick. Can't be worth any more than they were, either. And it isn't likely to cause the storm of protest in fandom that the Shaver Mystery enjoyed—Palmer isn't pulling his stunt in a top circulation 'zine this time.

But there's one aspect that might be interesting to watch. If Palmer is insistent about his writers straitjacketing their work into one specific field of subject matter, there won't be many good stories come out of it. It'll just seem like "writers aren't able to write good stuff any more!"—if a few editors don't mind my quoting them verbatim. Then, just to be cruel, let's assume Ray's psychic stuff is played off right and racks up top circulation, that he becomes the fair-haired boy paying top rates whom no dirty pro dares criticize at a fan convention. Then the rest of the 'zines will be getting what Palmer rejects.

Will I see a lot of dejected fans sitting around wondering why science fiction stinks again?

This here now feller Gibson sure likes to shoot off his mouth and manage to be 100% wrong, don't he! Now Joe's a nice guy, and has written some of the better science fiction we've run in OTHER WORLDS, and he's a faithful subscriber. So he has a right to say what he wants, because in the end, maybe he's only needling us, to spur us into action (because we detect a compliment here and there in his article.)

So my instinct sold Amazing Stories, *hey? Bosh, my boy. It was the stories sold* Amazing Stories. *A great many of them were fine stories. After all, you can't run Edgar Rice Burroughs, David V. Reed, Richard S. Shaver. S. J. Byrne, E. E. Smith, William P. McGivern, David Wright O'Brien, Robert Moore Williams and so on and on, without selling magazines! As for being ingenious, you might ask some of those writers where they got the plots and ideas for their stories. Actually, as many as 70% of the stories that appeared over a period of 11 years were straight out of our own ingenuity! As for my personality, no one has ever denied that my editorials have never been equalled for their personality content. Rival publishers offered me twice my salary just to write editorials for them. Leo Margulies was one of them.*

As for putting a whole mess of magazines on the floor and studying them to find out why they sold, all publishers do that—and they get mighty confused. So you say, make it unmistakeably sf. And make it typify the content. Plus make its appearance determine whether or not it is bought. Holy smoke! What else? But sometimes the BEST cover from those angles, falls flat on its face. Why? The mysteries of magazine distribution are beyond understanding. We only try the best we know how, and we experiment. Some experiments pay off, some do not. But it isn't a KEY to success! Not by a jugful. There is only one key to getting the reader, and that is good stories!

So you can never tell Ray Palmer anything unless it agrees with what he's already decided? Willing to back up your "tell" with money. IF it results in a drop in sales (or rather, if a drop in sales comes at the same time the "tell" is put into action)? After all, when a man's own money is involved, he listens to what experience he has, not to the opinion of the guy who has never done it!

The fact is, Joe, I've listened too darn many times to the other guy, and I ALWAYS regretted it. You see; it always went contrary to my instinct! And that I should have followed.

So you think, I'm going to make OTHER WORLDS a psionic mystic symbology? Because I asked the writers to do stuff like A. Merritt, and (oh heck, why name all the writers from Verne and Wells and Conan Doyle down to the most modern—they are all the TOP boys in sf history!)? Maybe it will spike your guns to mention some of the things OTHER WORLDS has on tap for the future, and that they represent exactly the things OTHER WORLDS is going to CONTINUE to present.

Remember "Empire of Jegga" by David V. Reed? (Yeah, I know, Palmer

screwed up the ending— but if he hadn't, the story would never have been finished or published!) Well, David V. Reed is scheduled for appearance in OTHER WORLDS with a 100,000 *word story BETTER than Jegga! And ONCE AGAIN, finished by Ray Palmer! THAT'S the kind of stuff we're getting for OTHER WORLDS!*

Then there's John Bloodstone. Remember his Flannagan stories in Amazing Stories? *We've got a brand new* 100,000 *novel by John Bloodstone, which is so wonderful we swoon with excitement every time we lay our hands on the manuscript. It's coming in OTHER WORLDS!*

Remember Don Wilcox and his tremendous novels in Amazing Stories? *Well, he's doing some for us "because he wants to write what he wants!" Brother—you know what to expect! Well, it's coming to you in OTHER WOLDS.*

Take the Hal Annas trilogy beginning in this issue. If this isn't good science fiction, we'll eat the manuscript. It's just a starter to what's coming.

What about S. J. Byrne? Some of his stories held a mystic tone, but do you remember the Prometheus novels? Just a starter to the one we have on hand from him! What a writer that man is! He's coming to you in OTHER WORLDS.

And a lot more!

And not a psionic word in the lot!

When did Ray Palmer demand socio-pathological crap? Never, my lad. In fact, we screamed against it from the very beginning. Horace Gold and his type of publisher demanded it, not us. And Horace don't like us none for saying it, but say it we do! We aren't alone in blaming the decline of stf on the lunatic fringe handling it's gotten on one hand by the ivory-tower boys, and the just plain ignorant handling it's had at the hands of the profit-takers, who thought they were coming in on a good thing just when it was duc to boom and make them a quick million. Take Hugo Gernsback, the father of science fiction. He came to the Chicago convention, and his eyes popped open at the tremedous turnout. He saw instantly the bucks to be made—and a lot of fans were there to pat him on the back, and tell him what to do! Get out a magazine like the old magazine, like the gal that married dear old dad! So out came Science Fiction Plus. I'd hate to tell you what it cost Hugo. But believe us, Hugo is through with stf for good. Finished! He never wants to hear the word again. And he proved at the very least he was way behind the times with science fiction, and at the most, he never did know what science fiction was, but had merely been coasting along on the novelty of the thing, and the enthusiasm of one Ray Palmer and his reader companions in the days when we became absolutely insane about the stuff— and still are!

Certainly I'll have colorful trimmings. How about the way I'm trimming up this magazine? Trimming it up when everybody else is pulling in their horns. I'm trying to give the science fiction reader what he wants, and the best that's in me, and the writers and even the printer!

One thing you're right on, Joe, I haven't been giving OTHER WORLDS the play, up to now. I couldn't afford to and I KNEW the market wuldn't take it. Even a Shaver Mystery, bursting brand new onto the field in the past two years, would have gone unnoticed. I sat quiet, doggo, holding back my big guns for the one big play at the proper moment. I think this is the proper moment. And I'm not just yelling and coloring trimmings. I am instinctive enough to try to give science fiction the best stories it is humanly possible for me to dig out of the best authors I can dig out.

I get down on my knees to guys like Edmond Hamilton, S. J. Byrne, Don Wilcox, John Bloodstone, Hal Annas, Richard Shaver, and a whole host of other guys whom I know, and YOU know

can write rings around any of these Johnny-Come-Latelys. And I feel darned flattered at the way they have responded. To a man they have agreed now is the time to give science fiction back to the science fiction reader, to the best of their ability. They have agreed to help. Money has not been mentioned, except where it has been REFUSED. It's a do-or-die attempt for the science fiction we all love. We'll bring it back, or else!

After all, no writer makes a fortune, or even a good living, in science fiction. Even if it goes over as big as Amazing Stories *once did, they aren't going to make a lot of shekels. But boy, they will be proud if they succeed, and mighty blue and nostalgic if they don't. This Joe, is something we love. It's science fiction, and it has been raped, stabbed in the back, pilloried, misrepresented, scuttled and debased.*

And as part of its heroic past, you gotta step in now and criticize? You get to predict that whatever I do, it will come out voodoo? Will you eat your words if it doesn't? You got to wonder if the fans will be sitting around dejected wondering why science fiction stinks AGAIN? Do you mean, Joe, that it stinks because of ME? And that I'll repeat?

Joe, I'm surprised at you, I'm ashamed of you, and I'm slightly mad at you—but I know you are a good guy, and I forgive you.

Joe, my writers won't be in any straitjacket! Ask Don Wilcox why he wrote me and asked to do stories for me again, because he knew that I was the only editor who would take a "work of love," not in the stereotyped groove all the other editors insisted he write—or not at all. Don doesn't make his living writing science fiction. It will reduce his income to do it—but he WANTS to do it, so badly he can taste it. I, for one, appreciate Don Wilcox. It makes me so damned happy I could cry. It's things like that mean a lot to a man, Joe. That's what I call success. Whatever it is, instinct or personality or ingenuity, the thing that brings me letters like that is what is going to make OTHER WORLDS what it is going to be!

And Joe, this is the end, if it doesn't go. If OTHER WORLDS is a bad job, it will be because Palmer is what you say he is. And he won't be too proud to throw in the sponge, and leave the field to better men. We haven't any more money to lose—we've lost it all. If nobody reads OTHER WORLDS with what I'll put into it in the next year, the printer won't be paid, and nothing I can do will keep OTHER WORLDS alive. But if the readers enjoy what they find in the next year, nothing I can do will keep the magazine from going ahead— and I promise you one thing Joe, whatever comes in in cash, will go right back out for more and better science fiction. It's up to the readers, Joe. OTHER WORLDS can outsell even the old Amazing Stories *and certainly* Galaxy and Astounding, *if what I've just said is the truth.*

Joe, the only thing I have in mind is to make OTHER WORLDS the best science fiction magazine published, and that's in YOUR opinion—and I hope you write me some day and say it's so!
—Rap.

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RAIN FOREST OF VENUS

By

Robert Gibson Jones

SCIENCE tells us (from observations made at admittedly long range and with admittedly inconclusive mechanisms) that Venus is terribly hot and dry, with no breathable (to humans) atmosphere, and nothing but a dust heap of swirling storms in which we humans would certainly not want to live, if we could. My paint brush tells me differently, and, I maintain, with as reasonable a basis. If you will glance at the back cover of this magazine, you will see what that brush tells me.

Venus is a young planet—younger than the Earth by millions of years. Some even say she isn't a daughter of the sun at all, but a stray female who has come into our family, homeless and unloved. Well, we love her here, and she is the most beautiful object of our evening and morning skies, excepting the moon. Being young, she is still very virginal, and very fertile. Within the womb of her white cloud blanket, she carries very primitive life forms, largely vegetation of a gigantic stature and luxuriant and prolific growth. She has no coal deposits as yet, because these forests she now gestates will one day form that coal.

As one wanders in these primitive forests, he sees trees gigantic beyond all his imaginings, and fantastically formed. Indeed, many of them are not trees at all, but ferns, with pulpy hearts that can hardly be called wood. All wood is soft, and hardwoods are not known. And each giant growth bears not only leaves, frondlike and almost fleshy, but masses of the most beautiful flowers ever seen. Over all creeps a variety of mosses whose growth is so swift that it can be seen with the naked eye. Indeed, if our travelers are not continually on the alert, they may be overwhelmed by a hungry mass of vegetation intent on smothering and consuming everything within its vicinity.

Water is everywhere, and the whole planet is a veritable swamp. We slosh through it, always careful to test our footing before we trust it to bear our weight; for we can sink out of sight in bottomless pools of ooze and primeval slime. Water drips continually, also, from the vegetation about us. Yet, in spite of all this water, it never rains. Rain is unknown on Venus, and although this is a rain forest in every sense of the word, it is not in the literal sense that the water actually falls from the sky. Venus is surrounded by a perpetual sphere of water, as once the Earth was. Temperatures are even, and no rain processes are possible. Mist rises from the ground, condenses on the vegetation, and drips back again.

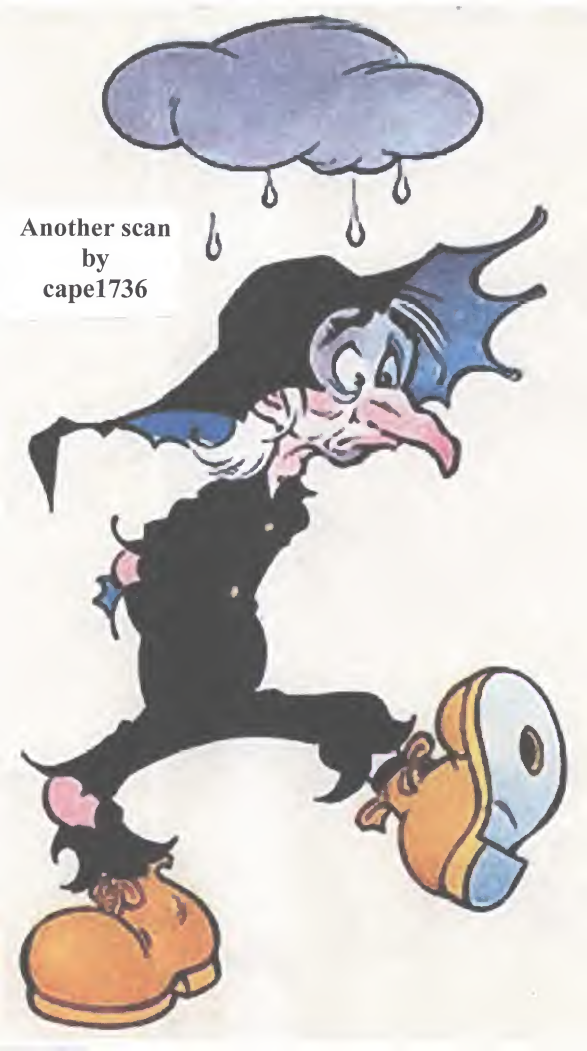
Flitting about are insects of incredible kinds, flying lizards, and indescribable reptiles winged and unwinged (the unwinged kind coiling ceasely from the vegetation, waiting to drop on their prey).

The borderline between animal and vegetable is hard to define, and sometimes we sit on a fallen stump, or stone, or fungus, only to find that it is animal, and that it moves to swallow us.

All about us, the splash of falling objects, of rotting ferns and stumps, reminds us that here is nature's swiftest growing and swiftest decomposing vegetation—for she is in a hurry. Only a few short million years to form a bed thick enough to make the coal that one day its human inhabitants will use for heat and power. And why not? Is there such a thing as a useless world? I prefer to think not, and that all planets are, or were, or will be, inhabited by men. That is why I do not think it incongruous to have placed a man and woman in my Venusian Eden.

This painting, by Robert Gibson Jones, is an example of his "accidentals", as he calls them. It is achieved by letting daubs of paint run on the board, haphazardly. When one suggests a scene, it is then filled in with detail and human figures.

(See story inside back cover)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